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CONTENTS

Vedic Prayers		457
Vedic Cosmology		
Editorial		458
Images of India's Past		464
The Ideals of Swami Vivekananda		
Swami Bhuteshananda		465
Approach to Truth in Vedanta		
Swami Ranganathananda		469
Memories of a Living Past		
Swami Gahanananda		475
Reminiscences of Mayavati		
Swami Atmasthananda		483

Continued on the next page

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Stray Thoughts on Advaita Ashrama <i>Swami Jyotirupananda</i> 486	in a Liberalized Economy <i>Dr.R. P. Banerjee</i> 493
Mundaka Upaniṣad <i>Swami Sridharananda</i> 489	The Story of an Orphanage's Birth <i>B.N.Sikdar</i> 499
Acceptance <i>Swami Satyapriyananda</i> 491	Reviews and Notices 502
Look Within: Paradigm Shift in Education	News and Reports 504

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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No. 3

VEDIC PRAYERS

स नः पावक दीदिवोऽग्ने देवाँ इहा वह।
उप यज्ञं हविश्च नः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.12.10

O effulgent purifier Agni! For our sake, please welcome and bring the gods to this place (where sacrifice goes on). Please deliver our oblations to them.

स नः स्तवान आ भर गायत्रेण नवीयसा।
रयिं वीरवतीमिषं॥
—Rg Veda, 1.12.11

O Agni, you are being praised by us with hymns which are composed in a fresh Gayatri metre. For our good, please bestow heroes, wealth and plenty.

अग्ने श्रुक्तेण शोचिषा विशवाभिर्देवहूतिभिः।
इमं स्तोमं जुषस्व नः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.12.12

O Agni, with your brilliant glory, with your hymns in praise of gods which are means to welcome them, please accept our prayers to you also.

Vedic Cosmology

Henotheism

It is a well-known fact that the Vedic sages did not adore any one particular deity. In at least two places, the *R̥g Veda* suggests that the number of gods and goddesses is 3339, though there is no mention of all of them in the Veda itself.¹ The sages deified the forces of nature, according to some modern scholars, and offered prayers to numerous gods and goddesses. The prayers were all petitionary, seeking release from disease and sorrow, seeking progeny, wealth and longevity, seeking the destruction of enemies, and rarely, seeking knowledge. The Vedic sages worshipped numerous gods and goddesses, no doubt, and each one was called the creator of the universe; but each god or goddess was none other than the supreme Being Himself. It was Prof. Max Muller, who coined the term 'henotheism'. Commenting on this, Prof. Radhakrishnan says:

Monotheism is inevitable with any true conception of God. The Supreme can only be one.... The implicit demand of the religious consciousness for one supreme God made itself manifest in what is characterized as the henotheism of the Vedas. It is, according to Max Muller, who coined the term, the worshipping of each divinity in turn, as if it were the greatest and even the only god.²

We shall consider only a few gods and goddesses, and see how the Vedic sages dei-

fied each one of them as the supreme.

The most powerful deity of the *R̥g Veda* is Indra, who is famous as the destroyer of the demon Vṛtra. The sage Viśvāmitra praises Indra in this manner: 'Indra is the support of the earth, the heaven and all other higher worlds. His actions are marvellous. He has created the sun and the goddess of light (Uṣā).'³ Again, the sage addresses Indra and says that the moment he entered heaven and earth, he has become the ancient creator and controller of everything.⁴ In a later hymn, Indra is called the only emperor of all the worlds (*eko viśvasya bhuvanasya rājā*).⁵ The sage Vāmadeva calls Indra the first-born (*tvamadhi prathamam jāyamāno*). The same sage eulogizes Indra in this manner: 'He who has created the universe with the help of his parent, provides strength to it often.'⁶ In a somewhat unusual mantra, the sage Bṛhaduktha says that Indra is the originator of his own parents [ie, heaven and earth].⁷ The implied meaning is that he is the source of everything.

The next god is Varuṇa. It was Varuṇa who created the oceans, says a sage.⁸ There are some hymns which are jointly addressed to Indra and Varuṇa. One such hymn says that Indra and Varuṇa jointly created all these worlds along with the living beings.⁹ Further, sage Vasiṣṭha praises Varuṇa as being the controller of all the worlds, as being the motivator of the stars and space, and the one who

1. *Trīṇi śatā trīsaḥsrāṇyagniṃ trīmśacca devā nava cāsaparyan.* —*R̥g Veda*, 3.9.9 and 10.52.6. [Hereafter, RV.]

2. Dr. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Vol. 1, pp. 90-91.

3. RV, 3.32.8.

4. RV, 3.32.10.

5. Cf. RV, 3.46.2.

6. RV, 4.17.7.

7. Cf. RV, 4.17.12.

8. Cf. RV, 7.87.6.

9. RV, 7.82.4.

expanded the universe.

We come to Soma next. The Vedas have deified the Soma plant and its juice to such an extent that hymn after hymn is dedicated to it. However, till now it has not been traced. A mantra of the sixth circle (*maṇḍala*) says that Soma caused everything: 'This great Soma caused the six states (*ṣaṭ-urvīram*) and no one who is born can remain away from him.' Commentators say that the six states mentioned are the heaven, earth, day, night, water and vegetation.¹⁰ Soma is called the father, and the crown of heaven.¹¹ This Soma, again, is the centre of the world, the support of the universe, and the heart of the waters.¹² It is said that Soma and Agni have jointly held the sky and the stars in position, and remove the obstacles to the flow of rivers.¹³

Next is Agni, the fire god. A sage says that just as he did with the human beings, Agni has created all the worlds also, and it is through him that one gets the taste of creation.¹⁴ There are two important mantras which glorify the sun as the maker of the universe. One says that the sun is the Self of everything.¹⁵ By his rays, the sun makes everything perfect. In a later hymn, the sun is said to have given birth to the joy-producing earth and heaven. He has also enveloped the earth and heaven to help living beings.

Is the Vedic pantheon male-oriented? Not at all! There are female deities — goddesses — who are called the originators of everything. Uṣā, for example, is variously called the mother of the sun, the maker of all the six seasons, and the first-born (*prathamā*)¹⁶. Uṣā enlightens the whole universe, says a sage. Whichever creation is

worth its name when it is all dark and dull? It is light that transforms everything. 'Uṣā comes in a hundred chariots (that is, with the speed of a hundred chariots) from the sun to the human beings.'¹⁷

The goddess of speech, Vāk, herself declares in a hymn that 'she' is the 'father' who gave birth to the sky (*aham suve pitaramasya*) and that she goes about creating the worlds.¹⁸

We have seen that many gods and goddesses are independently declared to be the creators, as our sages knew the importance of creation and they did not think deification complete until and unless each god or goddess was called the originator of everything. One must not, however, hazard inaccurate conclusions that the Vedic seers were talking irrelevant things and calling so many deities as creators. What is the idea behind, then? It is the same *R̥g Veda* which declares that it is one supreme Being alone who is real, and that sages give it various names.¹⁹ There is one more place where such a declaration is made. 'He who is our father, originator, controller, and knows everything about the universe, is one but assumes various names.'²⁰ So, it is clear that if at all there is a creator, He or It, is one only.

16. RV, 1.113.2,3.

17. RV, 1.48.7. Also cf. 'The fact that light travels at a finite, but very high, speed was first discovered in 1676 by the Danish astronomer Ole Christensen Roemer. He said light's speed was 1,40,000 miles/sec., but today, 1,86,000 miles/sec.' — Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam Books, 1997), p.13. [Hereafter, *Brief History*.]

18. RV, 10.125.7,8.

19. *Indram mitram varuṇamagnimāhuratho divyaḥ sa susargo gurutmān; Ekaṁ sadviprā bahuḍhā vadantyagnim yamaṁ mātariṣvānamāyuh.* —RV, 1.164.46.

20. *Yo naḥ pitā janitā yo vidhātā dhāmāni veda bhuvanāni viśvā yo devānām nāmadhā eka eva.* —RV, 10.82.3.

10. RV, 6.47.3.

11. RV, 9.69.9.

12. RV, 9.72.7.

13. RV, 1.93.5.

14. RV, 1.149.2.

15. RV, 1.115.1.

Going Deep Within

The tenth circle of the *R̥g Veda* is perhaps the best portion of the whole, so far as cosmological ideas are concerned. In one of the hymns attributed to sage Br̥haduktha, the earth is called the body of the universal God (*tanuṣṭe vājin tanvam*).²¹ In another hymn, the sage Bihaspati addresses the gods and says:

A god by name Brahmanaspati created all gods like an expert craftsman. From non-being came being (*asataḥ sadajāyata*). That is, even before the celestial beings were created, from non-being came out being. All the directions were created from Utthānapada.²²

Br̥haspati says in the subsequent mantra that from this Utthānapada (whose meaning is not clear to the scholars), came into existence the worlds, and from the world, the directions.

There is a remarkable hymn which describes the beginning of the universe in a big way. It is attributed to the sage Viśvakarma and the deity is also Viśvakarma. Scholars feel that by the term Viśvakarma, the supreme Being, who is the creator of the worlds, is meant:

Our Father who was a sage, sat down to perform a sacrifice in all the worlds. Desiring plenty, He covered those that came first (*prathamaccad*) and entered those that followed (*avāṅgāviveśa*). What was His seat during creation? From where and in what manner did He begin the creation process? From where did He create the earth and spread the sky above? He is the one Lord, His eyes everywhere, face everywhere, hands everywhere, feet everywhere. With both hands and all other parts (*sam pata-traiḥ*) He worked, and thus the heavens and earth were created. Which one was the

forest? What was the wood used to make the heaven and earth? O knowing ones, meditate and know as to where He stood to support His creation.²³

So, there was absolutely nothing for creating the universe. However, there was the creator who is the intelligent cause. He actively participated in the process of creation. As an earlier sage had said, Viśvakarma also says that no material was worthy enough to bring about this gigantic universe.

In the very next hymn, it is mentioned that in the beginning everything was in a fluid state — it was all water. Out of water the creator made this universe. When the four quarters receded further and further, the heaven and the earth got separated from one another. 'The knowers of Truth say that the Maker of everything is almighty, gigantic and supreme; He is above the seven sages, all alone. It is He who assumes the names of all other gods. He is our protector and controller. After the heaven and earth were created, the sages performed various costly sacrifices to create all types of human beings.... This creation was placed in the navel of this unborn Being (*ajasya nābhāvadhyekamarpitam yasmin viśvāni bhuvanāni tasthaḥ*), and in Him is everything present.'²⁴ It is interesting to compare what Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra and others: 'I see that all things — everything that exists — have come from this (meaning himself).'²⁵ The great sage Viśvakarma,²⁶ who was quoted above, concludes by saying that

23. RV, 10.81.1-4.

24. RV, 10.82.1-5.

25. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 945. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]

26. RV, 10.82.6. Also cf. 'But how did he [God] choose the initial state or configuration of the universe? One possible answer is to say that God chose the initial configuration of the universe for reasons that we cannot hope to know.' — *Brief History*, p.129.

21. RV, 10.56.2.

22. RV, 10.72.3,4.

ordinary people cannot comprehend the creator and hence say various things, being covered by darkness.

We now come to the *Puruṣa Sūkta*.²⁷ This hymn is addressed to the supreme Being who 'has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet.' The *Puruṣa* pervades the entire world and is beyond it also. Sage Nārāyaṇa, who is the sage of this hymn, says that all the worlds are only an infinitesimal part of Him.

This hymn has a special way of explaining creation. In a supreme sacrifice, the *Puruṣa* was the victim. He was cut into pieces. Out of the face came the scholar class, out of the two arms came the warrior class, out of the thighs came the business class, and out of the feet came the helper class. Further, His mind created the moon, eyes the sun, the mouth Indra and Agni, and *prāṇa* the air. From His navel was the sky formed. Continuing, this hymn says that Virāt, the cosmic Being, came out of *Puruṣa* and again the latter came out of the former. It is probably implied here that the creator and creation are one and the same. The *Puruṣa* might be considered as the material cause of the universe, because He is the victim of the sacrifice. He is again the intelligence behind the formation also.

In a later hymn,²⁸ directed to *ka* (an alphabet), the sage Hiraṇyagarbha repeatedly questions, 'To whom should oblations be directed?' The Hiraṇyagarbha, so says the hymn, was the only being present initially. He is the originator of living beings. He supports the universe and is the supreme Lord. He placed the land and the sky in their proper positions. He gave life and strength to beings. He is the controller of death. Hiraṇyagarbha is, according to Advaita Vedānta, the name given to the subtle body in its collective form.

All the subtle bodies put together is called the Hiraṇyagarbha or Sūtrātman.

We come to one of the greatest hymns (as scholars call it): the *Nāsadiya Sūkta*. This wonderful hymn is mystical and great on account of its depth. There are many translations of this hymn into English, and we shall follow Swami Vivekananda's translation.²⁹

The *Nāsadiya Sūkta*³⁰ is attributed to Prajāpati. 'Existence was not then nor non-existence. The world was not, the sky beyond was neither.' It was a period, so says the sage, where there was neither being nor non-being. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'This "existence" and "non-existence" are attributes of Prakṛti. The Reality is beyond both.'³¹ Swami Vivekananda also speaks of this state in his conversations:

In the process of entering into samādhi, first the universe appears as one mass of ideas; then the whole thing loses itself in a profound 'Om'. Then even that melts away, even that seems to be between being and non-being.³²

So, the Absolute is beyond dualities and creation begins only in the realm of Prakṛti. And, in that realm it was a time when there was neither being nor non-being. What was there then? Prajāpati himself asks the question: 'What covered the mist? Of whom was that? What was in the depths of darkness thick?' Since there was nothing at all, there was no death or immortality. Night and day were not separate from each other. 'But motionless did *That* vibrate/ Alone, with Its own glory one—/Beyond *That* nothing did exist.'

29. Cf. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 6, p. 178.

30. RV. 10.129

31. Gospel p. 948.

32. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 499.

27. RV, 10.90.

28. RV, 10.121.

Continuing further, the sage makes this statement: 'At first in darkness hidden darkness lay.' How can darkness be hidden in darkness? Though such mystical statements are difficult to understand, we may try to give an analogy. It is like our fate: we are ignorant that we are ignorant, and pose to be enlightened people. A bound soul is ignorant that he is bound, and thinks he is free.

It was all 'undistinguished as one mass of water.' It was at such a moment that, owing to *tapas* (literally, 'heat') the One came into being. 'Then *That* which lay in void thus covered, a glory did put forth by *tapah!*' At such a period, how did the idea of creation come, and from where? The One that was born, had a germ of desire. 'First desire arose, the primal seed of mind.' Thus, out of desire, whose rays 'above, below and sideways spread,' the creation process began. 'Creative then became the glory.'

Now, how did all this come to be known? 'The sages have seen all this in their hearts, sifting existence from non-existence.' However, sage Prajāpati himself adds that no one can know everything clearly. Even gods were created only after all this came into existence. 'This projection (*visṛṣṭi*) whence arose, whether held or whether not, He the ruler in the supreme sky, of this He knows, or knows not He perchance!' Even the creator Himself might not know about it all. This is the *Nāsadiya* hymn.

In the hymn we discussed above, there was a mention of the word *tapah* (heat).³³ About this *tapah* and its effect on creation, we have a hymn which is the last one to speak of cosmology in the *R̥g Veda*. 'From the glowing *tapas* did the two, *ṛta* (moral order)³⁴ and *satya* come into existence. Later, the night was born,

and still later, the ocean came into being. From the oceans filled with waters, the annual seasons (*samvatsaram*) came. He later created night and day, and all know it.' The sage Aghamarṣaṇa, to whom this hymn was attributed, makes a final statement: 'The creator brought the sun and the moon, the heaven, the earth, and the sky into existence — all as it was before (*yathā pūrvam*)'³⁵ It is important to note in this connection what Swami Vivekananda says about creation: 'The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same.... In that case, God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable.... So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation.'³⁶

We thus saw how the sages of the Vedas viewed the creation of the universe. Initially, there was wonder and astonishment. Slowly, some ideas about the creator and His creation were learnt. The great seers of the Vedas have declared that there is a supreme Being behind all this creation, call Him by whatever name you want. That is the final verdict of the Vedas. Most of the statements in the Vedas are mystical, and may require great minds to decipher clear meanings. We must therefore be cautious regarding the study of the Vedas. There must be an attitude of reverence. As we said earlier, the Vedic hymns are not just poetry. They are the collection of the deep spiritual insights of our ancient ṛṣis. Swami Vivek-

33. 'At the big bang itself, the universe is thought to have had zero size, and so to have been infinitely hot.' —*Brief History*, p. 123.

34. 'The whole history of science has been the gradual realization that events do not happen in an arbitrary manner, but they reflect a certain underlying order, which may or may not be divinely inspired.' —*Brief History*, p. 129.

35. Cf. 'Thus, when we see the universe, we are seeing it as it was in the past.' —*Brief History*, p. 30.

36. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

ananda has said that by Vedas, no books are meant. Whatever is true is Veda. Veda is a compendium of universal truths, and they will remain for all time to come. Sages realize these truths just as the law of gravitation was 'realized' (ie discovered) by Newton. One important difference is that the sages began their search for knowledge with the Self, while the modern approach is the study of the external world.

Swami Vivekananda's comments on the Vedic idea of creation are worth noting:

Veda means the sum total of eternal truths; the Vedic Rishis experienced those

truths; they can be experienced only by seers of the supersensuous and not by common men like us.... Veda is of the nature of Shabda or of idea. It is but the sum total of ideas. Shabda, according to the old Vedic meaning of the term, is the subtle idea which reveals itself by taking the gross form later on. So, owing to the dissolution of the creation the subtle seeds of the future creation become involved in the Veda.³⁷

Thus, Vedic cosmology is a great subject for study. □

37. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, pp. 496-97.

Dol Purnima

Dol Purnima (or, Dol Jatra) on 2 March 1998 is a Hindu religious festival. Sri Krishna and Radha are the central figures of this celebration, their images being placed on a swing which is rocked now and then. A red powder is showered on the images. Later, friends and relatives throw the powder at one another. This festival is celebrated when winter passes into spring, on a full-moon day rendered doubly sacred by its association with the birth of Sri Chaitanya.

Sri Chaitanya was born in 1485 on this day under Simha (the sign of Leo). Sri Keshava Bharati was the monastic teacher of Sri Chaitanya. 'Chaitanya is an example of ecstatic love. He laughed and wept and danced and sang in divine ecstasy,' says Sri Ramakrishna. He also says, 'God incarnated Himself through Chaitanya.' Chaitanya was also a great scholar. He had the nature of a Vijnani, according to Sri Ramakrishna. Chaitanya preached the glory of Hari's name. He enjoyed the company of devotees. He attained *mahābhāva* and *prema*. What did he teach? 'He said that the duties of householders were kindness to living beings, service to the Vaishnavas (ie, devotees), and the chanting of God's holy name.' Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna recommended the study of the life of Chaitanya. Chaitanya said: 'The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles, and the seed falls on the earth, germinates, and at last bears fruit.'

For centuries and centuries the lovers of God in India have been worshipping the Divine by recreating in themselves the yearning of the gopis for Krishna. Many of the folk-songs of India have as their theme this sweet episode of Krishna's life. Sri Chaitanya revived this phase of Hindu religious life by his spiritual practice and his divine visions. In his ecstatic music Chaitanya assumed the role of Radha and manifested the longing to be united with Krishna.

—from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Price of Purity

The king first wanted Padmini in exchange of raising the siege. That was out of the question. Next, the king wanted at least to see her. That also was refused. Later, the king said that he would take away his army if he were allowed at least to see Padmini in a mirror. No, that also could never happen. The whole of Chitor was one: they would sacrifice their lives, but not the modesty of their beloved queen. Thus, a fierce battle was fought. From Chitor's side women fought side by side with men. Finally, when the alien king won, he entered Chitor. What did he see there? There was no sign of human life at all: every citizen had died, fighting for the queen's modesty.



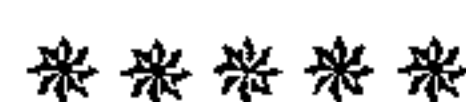
The Great Emperor

He despised print, but supported writers and copiers. His library contained over twenty-four thousand handwritten works, which, according to historian Smith, valued about \$3,500,000. He had the *Mahabharata* read to him and translated into Persian. He could not read and write. So, he had the Upanishads read to him. When Catholics fought Protestants in France and the reverse was happening in England, he called the adherents of the two faiths in India, and made them promise that they would maintain peace. He founded a new religion consisting of the salient features of all faiths. He refused to be converted to his original faith even on his deathbed. That was the great Akbar—the wisest ruler of Asia as the historians call him.



The Hindu Economics

Megasthenes was astounded! 'The Indians neither put out money at usury (lending) nor know how to borrow. It is contrary to established usage for an Indian either to do or to suffer wrong, and therefore they neither make contracts nor require securities.' Monier-Williams feels that perhaps this failure to develop a strong credit system helped the Industrial Revolution to establish the European domination of Asia.



Lord Hari's praises should be sung by a devotee who is humbler than a blade of grass, is more forbearing than the tree and who reveres even those who may not be worthy of it.

—Sri Chaitanya

The Ideals of Swami Vivekananda

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

The 12th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, attained Mahasamadhi in August, last year. In this article, which was a lecture in Bengali and was transcribed, translated into English, and edited, Revered Maharaj has dealt at length with the need of understanding Swami Vivekananda, and following him for benefit of the individual as well as the collective.

It is one hundred and thirty-seven years [in 1999] since the birth of Swami Vivekananda, and a hundred years have passed following the founding of his first organization, the Ramakrishna Mission. Swamiji's life and teachings are studied everywhere now with greater reverence and enthusiasm. By doing so, we get solutions not only to the problems in India but also those faced by the other countries of the world. This is because, Swamiji is not the property of any particular place or group. He came as the message-bearer of Sri Ramakrishna and was committed to the welfare of the entire human race. We are trying to understand him from this angle only and the attempt has taken us so long already; for, it needs time and patience to grasp anything of great magnitude.

There is hardly any problem in the world to which Swamiji has not given a solution. Perhaps the time is not ripe as yet to fully realize what Vivekananda has achieved within the short span of his life. One day, while strolling on the grounds of Belur Math, Swamiji mused aloud: 'Only another Vivekananda can understand what this Vivekananda has done.' This was not a display of egotism but an expression of Swamiji's realization of his Master's greatness. Why? His doing means his Master's doing, with the help of the instrument called Vivekananda. He was never an egotist; he felt the force of Sri Ramakrishna behind each one of his actions. There was no place for pride in his mind.

Vivekananda had evaluated his own activity impartially. Come to think of it, who else but Vivekananda could have made such a statement! His understanding of his own work is indeed the proper understanding, and we are only trying to grasp a little of him.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji wandered throughout India, nursing in his heart the fire of acute divine discontent. The Master had said: 'You will find liberation only after completing the work assigned to you by the Divine Mother. Till then the doors are locked and the key is with Her.' In the core of his being, Swamiji sought samadhi in the solitude of the Himalayan caves. But Sri Ramakrishna denied him permission. Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to carry on the work he had come for, and that instrument had to be a perfectly faultless one so as to accomplish the work. We, his admirers, believe that Sri Ramakrishna is an avatar who came for the welfare of humanity. He himself mapped out the blueprint for this great work, and Swamiji was given the responsibility of executing it.

After protesting initially, Swamiji ultimately bowed down and took up the burden. Till his last breath, he served this cause with one-pointed devotion. His work followed a clearly outlined pattern. Incapable of being blinded by pride, Swamiji always marvelled at how Sri Ramakrishna's ideals manifested through him. The time has not yet come for

us to fully assess the impact of the ideals of Swamiji that we are following. We are just beginning to glimpse a few flashes of it.

Swamiji had told his brother disciples, 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you.'¹ Swamiji was convinced that the Mother's power was going to change the flow of events of the world radically. That is why he said: '...; it is her Math that I want first....we must first build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters....'² The uplift of women that will take place through this would help the awakening of India and also of the whole world. His vision was such that it encompassed not any particular country or race, but the entire humanity. Its wide-ranging effects will, in course of time, find expression in all spheres of life.

Those who want to follow Swamiji's ideals will find his ideals clearly spelt out in the nine volumes of his *Complete Works*. If we begin to follow them in right earnest, we shall find that nothing is really beyond our means; everything will be possible. Swamiji had said: 'I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth.'³ The growth he speaks about is spiritual. All our development will be founded on spirituality. Without it, we could lose our way and come to grief.

The other thing Swamiji stressed was education. By education, he meant the spreading everywhere of man-making education. Swamiji's idea is that whether it is religion or education, it must not be confined to privileged classes alone. All must have access to it. Our country has given birth to many prophets and scholars. It is only when their treasures are made everyone's property,

when education is brought to everyone, that real awakening takes place. If there is no ideal or sense of values behind the awakening, then such an awakening will only be a social revolution. That will not have a permanent and noble effect on the world. Swamiji always gave great importance to the values and ideals of life. Without these, all efforts would be fruitless.

Development must be comprehensive. By this is meant that the divinity lying dormant in each and every individual must be allowed to blossom forth. Swamiji was not satisfied with the upliftment of just one or two individuals. He wanted everyone to grow up and develop, and for this ideal he sacrificed his own life. Not only that. He said that he himself did not want liberation so long as even a single soul remained in bondage.

Let us be inspired by this broadness of Swamiji. He wanted us to think of others first; of ourselves, later. His practical Vedanta was for this purpose alone. This Vedanta will inspire us towards higher goals, will keep us aware about our ideal, and will bring about real good. Swamiji was of the view that religion, education and social work, all become futile if we are unable to see God in all beings. For, there will only be a wastage of energy owing to differences between various opinions, leading to unnecessary conflicts; no benefit will accrue of it.

Swamiji sought total welfare of everybody, irrespective of the divisions of caste, community, creed, or nationality. If we cannot grasp the true meaning of his ideals, then all our endeavours will get trapped in narrow confines. Swamiji repeatedly said that our life is for the sake of others. We have not taken birth only for our own sake. Just as he had dedicated himself for others' welfare, he expected that we too should likewise give up all self-interest and work for the common good. And until we do that, no matter how much

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol.1 p. 484.

2. Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 484.

3. Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 213.

we display our respect and worship him, we shall have failed to accept Vivekananda wholeheartedly. We have to constantly weigh and see what Swamiji wants and what we are actually giving. There is no need to view Swamiji as an individual, for he himself said: 'I am a voice without a form.'⁴ Whether we accept Vivekananda or not, if we follow his ideals, the path will be straight and clear before us.

Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji are only reflections from different angles of that one ideal. If we revere the Master, we can easily accept the Holy Mother with our whole heart. And if we do so, we will also come to accept Swamiji. To accept Swamiji means to steer our lives along the path shown by him. Spreading the name of Swamiji does not mean propagating his personality and making him a cult figure, but spreading the ideals that are personified in him.

Why did Vivekananda want the awakening of India? If India rose, her ideals would invigorate the whole world. He said repeatedly that the spiritual welfare of the world is linked with that of India. Remembering this message we call Vivekananda the patriot-saint. He saw India as the personification of a great ideal. And in order to spread this idea all over the world, India has faced many obstacles but has not been annihilated; for, the world needs to listen to her message of hope. Swamiji did not look at India the way we look at her. To him India was a living embodiment of his cherished ideals. What the ideal of India was in ancient times, what the situation is in the present day and the heights it will conquer in future—the entire picture of all this was in his mind. He gave the crowning position to India only with its future glory in view. This is not his patriotism alone, but love for the ideal—the ideal which India personifies.

Every year we observe Swamiji's birthday with grandeur. A variety of discussions are held, but afterwards we go to sleep, as it were. This is according to our nature. Swamiji has said that this is not the time to sleep. We must actively participate and put forth our best efforts to engage in the transformation that is taking place in the world. Swamiji reminded us to keep burning in our heart the flame of renunciation through the help of which alone we can do real good to the world. In the Upanishads it is said that some achieved immortality through renunciation. Swamiji has altered this slightly. He said that it is *only* through renunciation that immortality can be achieved. Remembering his Master's own words, Swamiji considers renunciation as the basis of spirituality. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No spiritual progress is possible without the renunciation of "woman and gold."'⁵ Neither religion nor morality, nor material wealth even—which is but temporary, can bring about anything that is lasting. Let us be established in the spirit of renunciation. This renunciation does not, however, mean forsaking our homes and running away to the forest. Renunciation basically means the giving up of self-interest. We can claim to be the followers of Swamiji only when we fully surrender our ego and selfishness.

To the Order of monks which he founded, Swamiji's message was, 'For the liberation of the Self and the welfare of the world.' He combined the two ideals of liberation of the Self and service to humanity. It is selfishness to seek only one's own liberation. Sri Ramakrishna said that there is no liberation for him and that he will have to come back again and again. In due course we shall all realize that there is no better way than to live with the spirit of renunciation, giving up all self-interest. Selflessly and with unswerving determination, we must work for the

4. Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 283.

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 379.

good of others. Let us not imprison service within the narrow cell of what is called social welfare. The true spirit of service comes only when we see God in each being. God dwells in all creatures. The world will be truly benefited if we perform service as worship of Shiva who dwells in every tiny particle of the universe.

Forgetting the true meaning of religion, we have identified it with only external rituals and social observances, and made it narrow. In politics we have narrowed our vision to the interests of a particular group or community. Similarly, even in social activities, the ghost

of narrow bigotry blinds our vision. Therefore, first of all we have to be perfectly unselfish and vow to serve God and God alone. That is why Swamiji gave such a high position to Vedanta. The whole world is in great need of such an ideal. Without it, quarrels between nations, and between ethnic groups, between religions, and so on will not cease. Peace will not come until people stop seeking enhancement through oppression. It is high time we paused and pondered the path pointed out by Swamiji. In no other way can peace be restored. When there will be no more scope for selfish aggrandizement, then will the world arise and awake. □

Swami Yogananda

As a boy he mistook Sri Ramakrishna to be a gardener, but he was right: Sri Ramakrishna had come to weed out the evil in the human heart and plant the seeds of devotion. He mistook Sri Ramakrishna to be giving a very commonplace advice when he was asked to repeat God's name to be free from lust. But according to his brother disciples, he was pure to the marrow, and that was owing to his practising what his master had taught him. He mistook Swamiji when the latter preached the ideal of organization and so on, but he was only voicing the opinion of later sceptics and critics, who would have spoken nonsense in Swamiji's physical absence. That, then, was Swami Yogananda.

Swami Yogananda was the foremost disciple of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. He accompanied the Mother to Vrindaban and other places on pilgrimage. After his return, he subjected himself to severe austerities at Banaras. In those days he took a vow of possessing no money, and all his time, except two or three hours of sleep, was devoted to meditation. To reduce the time spent on procuring food, he would collect a number of chapatis by begging once in three or four days, keep them tied up in a cloth, and take a portion of them powdered every day. This rigorousness told upon his delicate health. Swami Shivananda had remarked once about him, 'Swami Yogananda was extremely handsome and had a manly body.' Such a person became weak and thin. He got a severe attack of dysentery and had to return to the Math. He was very emaciated, but his face looked healthy and luminous. His eyes, indrawn and reddish in tinge, resembled the 'divine eye' described by Sri Ramakrishna, and in spite of his physical ailments, he remained witty and jovial. Even when he was seriously ill, he continued to serve the Holy Mother. He passed away prematurely, leaving the Holy Mother to bemoan his death with an intensity of sorrow which few earthly mothers are capable of. What greater tribute could be paid to such a noble soul than these words of the Mother of the Universe in the form of Sri Sarada Devi: 'No one loved me like Yogen'?

His birthday falls this month, and he also passed away in March.

Approach to Truth in Vedanta

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj and Dr. Chandrasekhar, the Nobel laureate, were both invited to speak at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, in 1981. On 15 May that year, Revered Maharaj spoke on the 'Approach to Truth in Vedanta' and Dr. Chandrasekhar spoke on the 'Approach to Truth in Science'. We reproduce Revered Maharaj's talk in two instalments.

The Appeal of Vedanta to Thinking Minds

The subject of this afternoon's talk is 'Approach to Truth in Vedanta', and, you can add, 'and to human problems'. It is a wonderful study that you get today in the name of Vedanta, with its tremendous history of four thousand years—a philosophy of seeking truth in experience, very detached and very rational in approach. And what is amazing is that a philosophy and spirituality that developed ages ago got re-authenticated time and again, and is still living and vital today. Many creeds, dogmas, and institutional religions have been there in the past. They have all passed away. Many philosophies had no relevance after three to four hundred years. What is it that makes Vedanta appeal to thinking minds and relevant even after four thousand years, and, more particularly, in this highly intellectual age, dominated by its great scientific discoveries? It should not be forgotten that some distinguished scientists even today do study the Upanishads, do study the Vedanta; and they appreciate the great rational and universal approach of Vedanta. I have personally heard words of appreciation for Vedanta from some scientists, including our distinguished American astronomer, Professor Harlow Shapley, living in this very country, in Boston, when he came to Delhi. He said, 'I respect your Vedanta because it is so rational, it is not tied down to any creed or dogma. It is a sincere pursuit of truth in experience itself.'

Professor Max Müller refers to the passion for truth which inspired the sages of the Upanishads:

I believe much of the excellency of the ancient Sanskrit philosophers is due to their having been undisturbed by the thought of there being a public to please or critics to appease. They thought of nothing but the work they had determined to do; their one idea was to make it as perfect as it could be made. There was no applause they valued unless it came from their equals or their betters; publishers, editors, and logrollers did not yet exist. Need we wonder then that their work was done as well as it could be done, and that it has lasted for thousands of years?¹

From the last century onwards, when Western people came in touch with Indian thought, they saw an entirely different approach from what they had been associating with among their own thought in the West. We have seen it in our Western history: there is constant conflict between science and religion, and in general outlook, it is the spirit in conflict with the flesh, matter in conflict with mind. Our modern minds are conditioned by these events. We cannot imagine that there can be another approach where there will be none of these conflicts. But, today, more and more people are realizing that the approach in India to the subject of Truth is without any

1. *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, pp. 39–40.

such creedal and dogmatic limitations. There are varieties of approaches and different fields of experience to study.

Why should there be conflict? After all, truth is our aim. We approach it from different points of view and in different fields of experience. There must be understanding and tolerance. Now, this attitude is what makes the Upanishads—the fountain-head of the great philosophy and spirituality of Vedanta—a literature of immortal interest that, in this amazing age in which we are living, makes people study them as a serious literature. Unless a literature voices something deep in the human spirit, something profound in human experience, it cannot remain immortal like this. There is this famous line in the poet Tagore's *Gitanjali*: 'Where words come out from the depth of Truth'. Those words become immortal; when you read the literature of the Upanishads, you may not comprehend what it says, but you feel — 'Yes, some profound truth is being expounded here.' But what and where is that truth? It is here that the subject of this afternoon's talk — 'Approach to Truth in Vedanta' — assumes importance. About the earnestness of the sages of the Upanishads in the search for Truth, the Christian missionary Robert Ernest Hume says: 'The earnestness of the search for truth is one of the delightful and commendable features of the Upanishads.'²

Vedanta recognized two worlds for human investigation—the external world and the internal world. A vast inner world of experience waits to be studied and investigated. The external world is what is revealed to us through the five senses. We study that world, and that study, when conducted in a very systematic way, we call science. Even in the ordinary sense we do study that world; like a newborn baby trying to understand that world. What is that world that impinges on my sense organs every minute? The baby is puzzled. It is not able to understand what it

is, but it struggles to understand. Slowly, it gets a grip on the world while trying to understand it. Thus, you can see the child growing in knowledge of the external world. It is that study that becomes organized and precise when it becomes scientific. Today, in this modern period, that scientific approach to the external world has become very thorough and near-complete. That is what makes physical science a subject of profound respect for every lover of truth. That is the greatest contribution of the modern period towards understanding the environment in which we are living, and this understanding is necessary if we want to improve our life.

The Science of Human Uniqueness

If that is the only truth to be studied, then there is no further research necessary. But our experience tells us, as their experiences told the sages of the Upanishads ages ago, that unless we turn our searchlight to human nature itself, to find out what is behind this sensory system of man, our knowledge will remain incomplete and our life will remain unfulfilled.

It is another field of study, as impressive as that of the external world, rather much more impressive and rewarding; great truths are lying hidden in the heart of experience itself. We have to turn our attention there. There is no conflict between this study and that study. The study of the external world takes us to some distance and then leaves us there. The question remains with physical science: What next? What lies beyond it? That is also a valid investigation. In the Upanishads, that is the investigation that you find our great sages engaged in. India did not experience any conflict between physical science and the science of the inner world. The true meaning of religion, as understood in Vedanta, did not present religion as a sect, a creed, or a dogma which you have to believe. The investigation was to find out what is the truth about yourself as the Self, the observer.

In all the Upanishads, this is what you find as the special field of study—the study of

2. *Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 30.

the human being in depth. Both modern physical science and ancient Vedanta uphold the concept of human uniqueness. Where science leaves it off, Vedanta takes it up and carries it to the highest level. The sages thought for themselves: 'Because man is a product of nature which reveals only its external dimension in all the sciences that you study, we suspect that nature has also an internal dimension to be studied.' That dimension gets slowly manifested in organic evolution from the living cell up to man, and in man, along with the not-self awareness common to all living species, new breakthroughs have come, specially a new focus of awareness, namely, the Self. What is this profound datum of the Self—man as the subject, man as the observer? A profound datum it is. It is only in biology, specially in neurology in this century, that this datum has become of significance. Even the living cell has awareness, which no external material phenomena have. It is aware, but aware only of the external world and not of itself. That awareness is at first very elementary, but as evolution proceeds, it becomes more intensified, more variegated, giving the organism greater control of the external environment. And when you come to the human level of evolution, this awareness develops a new focus, the awareness of the Self or soul within.

In the words of the neurologist Grey Walter:

Thus the mechanism of the brain reveals a deep physiological division between man and ape.... If the title of soul be given to the higher functions in question, it must be admitted that the other animals have only a glimmer of the light that so shines before men.... The nearest creature to us, the chimpanzee, cannot retain an image long enough to reflect on it.... The brain of lion, tiger, rhinoceros and other powerful animals also lack the mechanism of imagination, or we should not be here to discuss the matter.³

Any species that develops this aware-

ness will dominate the world. And now you see a new phenomenon everyday, with a new light thrown on it—a little child guiding an animal, a big horse, or a bull, or in India even a big elephant! I have seen eight-year-old children managing elephants. What is in that child that is not in that animal, so huge physically? Some new datum has developed in that child.

Vedanta took up that subject in the Upanishads ages ago, which is appearing in neurology in our time. This wonderful focus is the centre of new developments in man, including the capacity to create culture through communication. Language also is a great new development. As a result of this new development, we achieved a new breakthrough, which is, as evolutionary biology says, the human being creating culture. And what is culture? Cumulative experience is culture, says biology. So human experience is not lost with the passing away of a particular organism. That experience is captured in poetry, art, literature, philosophy, religion, science, and it goes on cumulatively increasing, because the human being has communication facility based upon this new focus of the self.

Now, this is a second breakthrough in evolution, says modern biology; the first breakthrough was the emergence of the living cell with a little bit of freedom which no cosmic entities possessed. Therefore, the living cell is defined in biology as matter with the capacity to duplicate itself: it is self-duplicating matter; that is the first breakthrough. And culture is the second breakthrough. One great change takes place in the evolutionary process: evolution up to man was a blind force moving onward. In man, it becomes conscious, deliberate. We can take evolution in our hands and shape it in any particular direction. This capacity, organic capacity, man has. It was this datum that was investigated by the Upanishads. The West is only trying to investigate it just now in a very small way.

3. *The Living Brain*, p. 2.

The Science of the Human Being in Depth

Several biologists tell us today that we do not know much about the science of the human being in depth. We are only scratching the surface of this great science, whereas this is the science that India developed ages ago in its *adhyātma-vidyā*, the science of spirituality. It proclaimed that behind this body-mind complex there is a vast, infinite reservoir of energy which you can unfold and manifest. That is the meaning of the science of religion. Religion can be treated as an ethnic phenomenon or a tribal phenomenon. That is how we deal with religion today—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, etc. These are ethnic and socio-political expressions of religion, but religion has another aspect—it is a science, a science of man in depth, dealing with man's spiritual growth and all the blessings that follow from that growth. This can be studied, controlled, communicated, checked, and verified.

That is how the Upanishads developed this profound science of man in depth, so that a human being can grow beyond the limitations placed by the organic system. The individual can overcome these limitations. He or she can become a locus of freedom within this universe. Nothing in the world is free; even in man, the body is not free, and several things are not free. There is some focus of freedom beyond the body-mind complex, beyond the cause and effect determinism. That wonderful focus must be realized. India called it the focus of God, Atman. The word God which appeared in religion before had its own meanings. But, here, a new special meaning is given to whatever you call God—the eternal, immortal, infinite Consciousness, one and non-dual. Where do you seek for it? Seek for it in the individual, seek for it in the core of his or her being; not only because it is there, but the human being has the organic capacity to pursue this search, just like it has the organic capacity to pursue the search for the nuclear dimension of matter in the external world.

God so understood is called Brahman or

Atman by the Upanishads. It is of the nature of infinite Consciousness or *cit svarūpa*, one and non-dual. It projects the universe and all living beings, maintains it, and, at the end of a cosmic cycle, withdraws all to Itself, till a new cycle of creation begins. The main thrust of this teaching is that Brahman or Atman is present in the universe and the evolution of the universe, first cosmic, then organic, and finally spiritual, is a gradual manifestation of the Atman or Brahman. *The uniqueness of the human species is that it has developed the capacity to realize Brahman or Atman, the very source of the whole universe.* This supreme human uniqueness, which no other evolutionary species has, is described by *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* in a significant phrase: '*brahmāvaloka dhiṣaṇam*, endowed with the intelligence to realize Brahman.'⁴

No animal created science, only the human being has created science. Because he or she has the capacity to train the mind, to understand the truth that is there. But truth is not open; you have to break open the outer crust of nature and discover what is there. You have to knock at the door of nature. This training of the human mind in search of truth is a common training for physical science and the science of spirituality. You have only to change the plane of search. So, in ancient India, after some advancement in physical sciences like mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medicine, surgery, linguistics, etc, and concepts of the immensity of time and space, highly trained minds invested their energies in this new field of investigation, namely, the inner nature of the human being. They found no conflict between this as well as that. It is only a continuous process and external or internal are merely names without any significance so far as the truth is concerned. We make an artificial distinction between nature external and nature internal only for the purposes of study and research. We take this body as a measuring rod and say: 'This truth

4. *Bhāgavatam*, 11.9.28.

is outside, and this is inside.' Truth is like space; it has no internal or external; but we do make that distinction for practical purposes only. Space is indivisible; so is truth.

So, our ancient teachers said that there is some reality, some truth, hidden somewhere. We make it external or internal for the purpose of study, but after the study is over, we should not continue in that distinction; so, break down these barriers. Just like the ocean surrounding the earth—we call it Atlantic, Pacific, etc; but the earth knows only one ocean. In that way, our teachers said, let us pursue truth first in the external world. That is the most obvious aspect of reality that confronts us at the very time of our birth. We should continue the search, go deep into the human being, into the depth of consciousness, into the subject of the self. What is behind this self, what is the nature of this consciousness? Is man merely this tiny organic system? Or, is there something profound within himself—man the unknown? The American scientist Alexis Carell, early in this century, wrote a book, *Man the Unknown*. That is a remarkable field of search.

India's Unification of Science External and Science Internal

In the Upanishads, therefore, this great science of the human being in depth was developed. As a result, India treated it as a continuation of the search for truth outside by her physical sciences. No two sciences can conflict each other. This unification of knowledge external and knowledge internal is what is unique about Vedanta. Sri Krishna refers to it in the *Bhagavadgītā*:⁵

This body is called kṣetra or field, O son of Kunti; the one who knows this body (and its source in external nature) is called the kṣetrajña or the knower of the kṣetra by those who know it.

Know Me (the Divine Incarnation) to be the Knower of the kṣetrajña in all the kṣetras, O Bhārata. The (unified) knowledge of kṣetra and kṣetrajña is (true) knowledge, according to My view.

The knowledge of the *kṣetra* and the *kṣetrajña*—the unified knowledge of both is called *jñāna* or knowledge in the true sense of the term, says Sri Krishna. The body and its source, representing the external world (the not-self) and the Knower of the body representing the internal world (the Self)—both we have to know. That alone is full knowledge. Thus alone can you comprehend the totality of Reality, Reality in its wholeness. The Upanishads in one place spoke of truth and the Truth of truth—*satyam* and *satyasya satyam*. That is how Vedanta developed its approach to truth. One of the statements given in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* is that Vedanta is *sarva-vidyā-pratiṣṭhā*, a science which is the basis of every *vidyā* or science. There is a unity behind this diversity. That unity must be discovered. That can be discovered first by studying nature outside. Whatever conclusions you come to by that outside investigation is perfectly fine; but it will be inconclusive. Then you study the inside of nature as revealed in the human being. This is also a real scientific investigation. Vedanta discovered that unity. In the introduction to his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*, Sankara refers to this discovery thus: '*ātmaikatva vidyā pratipattaye sarve vedāntā ārabhyante*—all Upanishads commence with the search for the science of the unity of the Self.'

It is not a creed or a dogma meant for believing. You can test it for yourself. What is the true dimension of the human being? Is it merely this physical system, or this nervous system, or the psychic system? Go deep, try to pierce into these aspects. In fact, today's biology has already isolated three types of sheaths or coverings in nature. One is the ordinary nature, which you see outside, for which we use the word physical sphere; the second is the hydrosphere; and the third, atmosphere. That is understood in biology, physics and chemistry. Then there is a biosphere, the world can be seen through that

5. *Bhagavadgītā*, 13.1,2.

angle; then there is a psychic sphere.

The Upanishadic Concept of the Five Sheaths

In sociology, you have to deal with this psychic sphere. When I deal with you, I am dealing with a common medium by which I communicate. This is called a mind-field, as we say in physics. In sociology, without that mind-field, we cannot handle inter-relationships between human beings. It is not that just two individual physical systems are reacting; there is something subtler than that, and beyond the physical system, and is able to intertwine with other systems that are there. This study in sociology reveals a deep dimension of the human being. Says the American biologist George Gaylord Simpson, in his *The Meaning of Evolution*:

A broad classification of the sciences into physical, biological, and social corresponds with three levels of organization of matter and energy, and not levels only, but also quite distinct kinds of organization. The three are of sharply increasing orders of complexity and each includes the lower grades. Vital organization is more intricate than physical organization, and it is added to and does not replace physical organization, which is also fully involved in vital organization. Social organization retains and sums up the complexities of both these and adds its own still greater complexities.⁶

The Upanishads discovered the five sheaths covering the infinite Atman. The Upanishadic sages, therefore, said: Study this human system in depth. One whole Upanishad, the *Taittirīya*, is devoted to this study—that a human being consists of five sheaths or *kośas*: *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *monomaya*, *vi-jñānamaya* and *ānandamaya*; going inwards, the innermost is the ultimate Reality, Brahman or Atman, of the nature of infinite Consciousness, One and non-dual. It is like a sword in a sheath. The sheath is not the sword; it looks like a sword. Then add three

more sheaths, which are more and more subtle; ultimately, there is the sword. That sword is the example for the true Self.

Like what Simpson says, in the passage quoted above, the Upanishad even mentions that each succeeding sheath includes the previous sheath and does not replace it: *tena eṣa pūrṇaḥ*, the succeeding one fills the preceding one.

In this way, a tremendous investigation was undertaken into the nature of the human being by the Vedantic sages, by piercing through these external coverings, and they discovered a profound truth that the imperishable Reality that is called God by religions is hidden in every human being. The human being is essentially divine. This is a great truth, discovered and re-authenticated, and meant to be realized by every human being. It is not merely to be believed in, that comes again and again in the Vedantic literature. Not only we are divine, but we can also realize this Truth. And that realization will give you a fulfilment which nothing else can give. I may own the whole world. I may acquire knowledge from here and there, but unless this realization comes, the sense of fulfilment will not come me. So, this is how they investigated this subject, and, as I said, there is a smooth transition from the external to the internal, as the external search did not give conclusive answers. About the inconclusiveness of the conclusion of all physical sciences, Sir James Jeans says:

Physical science set out to study a world of matter and radiation and finds that it cannot describe or picture the nature of either, even to itself. Protons, electrons, and neutrons have become as meaningless to the physicists as X, Y, Z are to a child on its first day of learning algebra. The most we hope for at the moment is to discover ways of manipulating X, Y, Z without knowing what they are, with the result that the advance of knowledge is at present reduced to what Einstein has de-

Memories of a Living Past

SWAMI GAHANANANDA

In this article, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, gives a beautiful description of his days at the Advaita Ashrama—both Calcutta as well as Mayavati. We are grateful to Revered Maharaj for sending us these memoirs.

When I try to reminisce about my experiences at the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, and its Calcutta branch, the period of my joining the Ramakrishna Order invariably comes into picture. I joined the Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar, in January 1939. Srimat Swami Nirvananandaji Maharaj was the head of the centre then. Srimat Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj, who subsequently became the 7th President of the Ramakrishna Order, was staying there as a guest during that period. A year later, Swami Nirvananandaji left for Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, to assume charge as one of its managers. Swami Govindanandaji (Balai Maharaj) became the next head of the Bhubaneswar centre.

My Bhubaneswar days were spent in peace and joy in the company of holy men. Sometime in 1942, the then Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, wrote to Govindanandaji: 'Dear Balai, you have many assistants over there at Bhubaneswar. Please release Naresh (that was my pre-monastic name), as we need his services elsewhere. Hope you will not have any difficulty in forgoing the services of Naresh.' Revered Balai Maharaj loved me very dearly. He did not want to send me elsewhere. Consequently, he delayed replying this letter. In the meanwhile, during a short period when Revered Madhavanandaji Maharaj was away from Belur Math, Srimat Swami Amriteswaranandaji Maharaj, an Assistant Secretary of those days, wrote to his

friend, Balai Maharaj: 'You might have received Nirmal Maharaj's [Swami Madhavanandaji's] letter. Your silence conveys to us your consent to release Naresh. For, *maunam sammati lakṣaṇam* ('Silence of the listener implies his consent.') Please send Naresh to the Math as soon as you can.' That was it: Revered Balai Maharaj did not object to my leaving Bhubaneswar any more. It was in this way that my leaving Bhubaneswar became certain. It was also certain that my next place of stay would be the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta. I started for Calcutta from Bhubaneswar on 8 August 1942. The next morning, I went straight to the Advaita Ashrama from the Howrah railway station. The Ashrama was then situated at Wellington Lane.

The freedom struggle [for India's independence from foreign rule] was at its peak in Calcutta in those days. It was the phase of Gandhiji's Quit India movement. It was also a time when the Midnapore district of West Bengal declared national self-governance. In a socio-political atmosphere of this nature, I began learning my duties at the Advaita Ashrama. Services like worship etc, were a daily routine—and important ones too—at the Bhubaneswar Math. Here, however, things were altogether different: there was no worship, āratī, etc. There was a meditation room upstairs, but no rituals were practised. Swami Vivekananda had decided against any sort of ritualistic practices at Mayavati. Its branch at Calcutta also followed these injunctions from its very inception.

On account of its being a publication centre, the Advaita Ashrama has contact with all branches of the Ramakrishna Order. Whenever a monk or a novice visited Calcutta or Belur Math, he would also visit the Advaita Ashrama. Thus, I was introduced to many monastic brothers. I noticed an intimate relationship between the Advaita Ashrama and Belur Math. The main reason for this was, the then President of the Order, Srimat Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the Secretary then, Swami Madhavanandaji, an Assistant Secretary, Swami Vireswaranandaji, the Manager of the Math, Swami Abhayanandaji (Bharat Maharaj) — all were formerly inmates of the Advaita Ashrama. This being the case, I got an opportunity to come in touch with these elders.

I also noticed that, owing to publication activities, this Ashrama had international links even during those days, and with the passing of days, a strong network of multinational dimensions had been created. So, I got acquainted with an international, broad outlook. I understood how big the Ramakrishna organization was even during those days, and how great its activities were. My association with elders of the time is one of the greatest assets of my life. Swami Abhedanandaji was alive then. Many of the disciples of Swamiji and the Holy Mother were there. I had the opportunity of serving some of them during my novitiate.

When I came to the Advaita Ashrama, I heard that there would not be much work to do all round the year; intermittently, there would be a heavy work load, that was all. Owing to the after-effects of the Second World War, things changed: there was an increase in the demand for Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature from all over. The work load became equally heavy all through the year. I saw after a few years that I had to do five times the work that I had during my first year there. Swami Pavitranandaji was

the President of the Advaita Ashrama then, while Ramen Maharaj (Swami Vamadevanandaji) was the Manager of the Calcutta branch; Brahmachari Narayan Maharaj was the 'city editor' [an assistant to the editor] of the *Prabuddha Bharata*. The kitchen-supervisor (*bhandāri*) was Prafulla Maharaj and assistant to the Manager was Brahmachari Bhandarkar Maharaj. I was brought to the Advaita Ashrama in place of the last mentioned, who was transferred from there.

I got about a month's leave in November, 1945. I went on a pilgrimage to Deoghar, Varanasi, Kankhal, Rishikesh, Kishanpur, Barlowganj, and other centres, and on my way back, visited Varanasi also. At Varanasi I was fortunate to meet Srimat Swami Achalanandaji, Srimat Swami Sankaranandaji, Swami Omkaranandaji and many other elders. I had the experience of begging food from the feeding houses (*chatras*) also during the period. I had the great occasion of meeting Premeshanandaji Maharaj, Saradeshanandaji Maharaj, Swami Jagadanandaji Maharaj and the President of the Order then, Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, who was staying at Dehradun. To my surprise, when I came to Varanasi, I saw the head of my centre, Swami Pavitranandaji, there. He had come from Mayavati and was leaving the next day. Both Omkaranandaji and Pavitranandaji were great friends and I was witness the evening of my visit there of a beautiful session of humorous and joyful conversation between the two revered monks. Anyway, my desire to stay for a few days at the Sevashrama at Varanasi could not come by since I had to leave the next day with Pavitranandaji. Pavitranandaji insisted upon Omkaranandaji's visiting Calcutta, and thus, the latter too accompanied us.

There were some changes in the monastic setup of the Advaita Ashrama by then. Swami Vamadevananda was appointed head of the Singapore centre, and Swami Shantasarupanandaji (Parvati Maharaj) joined as

manager of the Calcutta branch. Narayan Maharaj, who looked after the *Prabuddha Bharata* affairs at Calcutta, went to Mayavati to assist in the journal's work there. Swami Brahmamayananda was the editor of the journal during that time.

Fortunately, I got a year's leave in 1947. I decided to go to Mayavati before the Durga Puja, towards the end of September. Meanwhile, Parvati Maharaj's going to the United States was confirmed. Even before my reaching Mayavati, Narayan Maharaj had been once again brought down to Calcutta. Parvati Maharaj went to America. Narayan Maharaj became the Manager of the Calcutta branch. Swami Madhavanandaji told me one day at the Math: 'Do you have the habit of consulting the almanac?' I said, 'No, Maharaj.' He told me: 'All right. When you go via Ayodhya, get down from the train and offer *pranams* there and resume journey.' I got down at Lucknow. My ticket for further journey was possibly for the next day. I was to go through Bareilly to Pilibhit and change the train. I reached Tanakpur by about 2 pm. Brahmachari Vijay had come to receive me at the Tanakpur station. We wished to reach Shyamala Tal before dusk. We crossed a river, walking over boulders. Vijay had brought something to eat. Having had a small snack, we resumed our journey. We went on walking. It was getting dark. There was a porter with us and he had fallen behind. Vijay told me that hill people like our porter are afraid of wild animals. Suddenly, we saw a leopard cross over in front of us. Vijay warned me: 'Please don't mention this to the porter. Or else, he will not proceed further.' It was almost dark. We were on the move. When we were near Shyamala Tal, we met a gentleman. The head of Shyamala Tal centre, Swami Apurvananda, had sent him. He had some food with him for us. Revitalized after eating the food, we resumed our journey upwards. That night, we spent in the Shyamala Tal Ashrama. The next day, after noon meal and

a brief siesta, we commenced our walk once again. We spent that night in a dak-bungalow on the way and continued our journey the next morning. I had some previous experience of climbing hills: in 1945, I had been to Mussoorie and Lachman Jhula. But those hills were of a different kind. We reached a place called Banlekh on the way. There was a tea stall there. The owner of this stall was formerly a cook at the Mayavati Ashrama. So, whenever he met monks, he would serve them with great devotion. He fed us too with sweets and tea. After climbing up and down for some more time, we ultimately reached Mayavati.

Mayavati! The beloved Mayavati of Vivekananda! Swamiji stayed here for about a fortnight, and was pleased with the place. He had come here on the 3rd January 1901 and stayed up to the 18th of the same month. Swamiji stayed in the *Gol Kamara* of the Ashrama. Though it was arranged to house Swamiji in a room upstairs, he came down owing to the immense cold in the first floor room. *Gol Kamara* is the very first [and the only] hall you find in the Ashrama, as soon as you enter: these days, it is a library for the ashramites. There is a fireplace there. In winter nowadays, firewood is lit on some days to make the hall warm. Mayavati is filled with the sweet memories of Swami Vivekananda's stay. He had said: 'I shall spend my last days here.' That, of course, could not happen. It is said that Swamiji used to move about the place like a small child. A little above the Ashrama where some agricultural activities are undertaken, there was a lake. There was also a small boat, used for boating in the lake. When Swamiji came to Mayavati, the lake was covered with a mass of ice. He used to walk on the footway next to the lake. People say that that path was called 'Swamiji's Walk'. The lake is not there now because, when roads were constructed below, the lake was emptied of water. If not, the road could easily be damaged on account of the water's seeping

down and causing landslides.

It was in fulfilment of Swamiji's desire that this beautiful place was purchased. The Sevier couple had purchased this land. Swamiji had an ardent desire to start a monastery in the heart of the Himalayas, where there would be no rituals like worship and so on, but the inmates of the Ashrama would perform sadhana according to the principles of Advaita. And the Western people would come and stay in the Ashrama and study Vedanta. Thus, Mayavati would bring about a union of the eastern and western ideals. Swami Vivekananda therefore wrote from Europe to his friend Lala Badri Sah that he should try to purchase a whole hill in the Himalayas, consisting of gardens etc. The money would be donated by his disciples. Swamiji wanted that the place: (a) would be about 7000 feet above the sea level, (b) would be enveloped with thick jungle and be secluded, and (c) would be such that from there, the snowy mountains would be visible. Mayavati has met all the three preferences of Swamiji. Having known the desire of Swamiji, Captain Sevier, along with Swami Swarupananda (the first monastic editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*), went about in search of such a place. In spite of their scanning Almora, Nainital and even Garhwal regions, they did not come across a place which could satisfy the above three needs. I have heard that a place was at last found in Champawat, Kumaon, which came almost near the ideal. However, the local people told Sevier and Swarupanandaji that at a little distance, there was a place 'called *Maipeeth* or *Mayipatta* which may be visited once.' The people added: 'That place is the tea-garden of one General MacGregor. The Englishman wants to sell away his tea-garden and leave. Please see if it is suitable to you.' The party went to that place. Seeing the scenic beauty of the place, they were thrilled. This is the place which Swamiji wanted, they thought. Captain Sevier negotiated with General Mac-

Gregor and purchased the hill. The name Mayavati has come from *Maipeeth* or *Mayipatta*.¹ The term *Mayipatta* means 'Mother's Place'. Even then, one could see a few stones, arranged in a circular form in about 2 or 3 square feet area. That is *Mayipatta*. One could see some coins too, in front of the deity. Thus, Swamiji's Advaita *peetha* [lit. 'seat'] came to be situated around the Mother's *peetha*.

Mayavati is about 6500 feet above the sea level, covered all over by a dense forest. It is also a hill, of the shape of a tortoise's back (*kūrma prsthā*). The plot of the Ashrama, plus the forest etc comes up to about 443 acres of land. From the Mayavati Ashrama, one can see the snow-capped mountain peaks—Panchachulli, Nandakot, Nandadevi, Trishul, Nilakantha, Chowkhamba, etc. The peaks spread over 210 miles. Nandadevi is the highest of them. In fact, it is the highest peak among the mountain ranges in India—25,645 feet. The rising and the setting sun, with his silken rays, makes a wonderful picture of these snow peaks and has also made Mayavati a heavenly place. Towards north, there is the hill which is visited by cotton-white clouds at night. When the sun rises in the morning, the clouds vanish. There are numerous animals in the jungles of Mayavati—tigers, leopards, bears, wild boar, deer, monkeys, porcupines, and so on. There are also a variety of birds. Oak, deodar, maple, pine, rhododendron, cassia, fur, cherry and so on are some of the common trees in the region.

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1. About how the name 'Mayavati' came into use, the sale-deed executed by General MacGregor on 27.2.1899 (and registered on 2.3.1899) may be read. It states: 'The vendor, General MacGregor either purchased or received [this land] in exchange from different villagers of Maipatta and planted it with fruit trees and tea bushes and named the whole estate which he possessed there as the Glengyle alias Mayavati of the sale of which he had full and absolute powers.' — Editor.

An assortment of flower plants are seen. Down below, there is a river called the Mayavati River. It was on its banks that Captain Sevier and Swami Vimalanandaji were cremated. There are some tea plants even now, though left uncared for.

Anyway, let us come back to our Mayavati Ashrama story. I met Swami Pavitrnanandaji who was then staying here, in accordance with the tradition of the heads of Advaita Ashrama, who divide their stay by and large equally between the two centres in a year. He told me: 'You need not follow any routine right now. Take bath, eat, and relax. Sleep well. Later, you can think of your routine.' The very first day I noticed that one cannot sleep after 2:00 or 2:30 in the morning. One wakes up spontaneously. Because of the calm, dust-free, sound-pollution-free atmosphere, one feels rested after just a little sleep. Here, I met Swami Brahmamayananda, the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* then, Karambiah Maharaj (Swami Amoghananda), the Manager of Mayavati Ashrama, Swami Pavananandaji and the Doctor Swami (Sachin Maharaj). Brahmachari Vijay did the typing work.

There is no dearth of light in the Ashrama all through the day, if there are no clouds covering the sun. In the evenings, one would not light lamps to study. It was time then for spiritual practices. Studies were restricted to daytime only. There were some articles used for games also, like badminton. Then there was walking. Either walking on level ground or going up and down the hill was the practice. There was a gramophone also. It can be safely said that there was practically no movement of people there at all. Everyday, you saw the same faces. Only when patients came to the hospital, or when there was a guest monk coming to the Ashrama, you had the occasion to meet new people. It was customary to arrange for the reception and farewell of monks by going

down the mountains. And there would be snacks and tea with us, whenever we went to receive guests. There was no electricity, but there was a Post Office at the Ashrama itself. Even now, there is the Post Office. One of the workers of the Ashrama works in the Post Office also. The newspaper—our only contact with the outside world—would come through the Post Office. It would take quite a few days for it to reach Mayavati. Now, things have changed considerably. There is a telephone at the Post Office, a vehicle, and there is a tar-road all the way from Lohaghat [a town about nine kilometres away from Mayavati] up to the Ashrama. There is a wave of change—one does not know how many changes are yet to take place. But the Ashrama-life of those days was a very difficult one. Everyone had to accept difficulties and hardships and live here. In winter, when there was snowfall, the temperature would go down to -4 or -5°C [which happens now also]. The toilet facilities were very poor.

There was a person by name Shahji. When the *Prabuddha Bharata* press was functioning from Mayavati, he used to work there. He was very old when I went there. After some difficult search, he was traced and brought to the Ashrama. He stayed there for some days and left. He was a funny man. He loved to play ludo. If he lost, he would insist on playing once more so that he might win. He told me many stories, of which one was interesting. He had been to a meat shop in Champawat. A gentleman was buying meat there. He was found to be very choosy in his buying. When the meat was weighed and was being packed, the shopkeeper told him, 'Did you notice the sky—how blue it is!' No sooner did the customer look up to see the blue sky than the shopkeeper deftly exchanged his choice meat to stale ones and packed them up. The poor gentleman did not come to know of it at all. Shahji was observing all this from behind. When the customer left, he told the shopkeeper, 'Friend, don't show me the blue

sky, anyway!’ This became a sort of password among us: if anyone was to say something to dupe the other, for fun though, we would say, ‘Don’t show me the blue sky!’ Shahji was simple, with a great memory. I heard from him the story of Swami Vivekananda’s visiting Mayavati in 1901. It is said that there was a bell at the Ashrama. When Swamiji arrived, the bell was rung. And it is also said that there was a gun. Filling it with gunpowder, Swamiji’s arrival was heralded by firing three times. We had proposed that Shahji should be paid some monthly allowance from the Ashrama. I heard later that it was being done. Shahji had not visited Belur Math. So, it was done. He also received spiritual initiation from Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj.

After coming to Mayavati, I visited Almora with Swami Pavitrnanandaji some days later. There was Karambiah Maharaj with me too. Pavitrnanandaji was going down to Calcutta for the winter. The distance between Almora and Mayavati is about 60 miles. Pavitrnanandaji left for Lucknow from Almora. We returned to Mayavati. I had tied a pedometer to my feet when I left Mayavati. I wanted to know how many miles I walked. I saw the pedometer in the fields—it read five miles. However, I got the information that the distance as the crow flies was only three miles. That means, to cover a distance of three miles, we had to climb up and go down a distance of five miles. Shahji had told us once: ‘I had been to conduct a relief with Swarupnanandaji Maharaj. Swarupnanandaji walked with ease in the plains but I could not do so. I was habituated to walk in the hilly regions—climbing up and going down. Thus, when we were in the plains, my speed would be reduced.’ While going to Almora, we had halted many times. However, while returning, we covered the distance in two days. I had worn a pair of slippers made of cloth, and this led to the formation of a boil in the soles of my feet. I also had a pair of ‘Vidyasagari

slippers’ with me. I used it later, for the rest of my journey. I returned to Mayavati in November. The doctor of the Mayavati hospital was going on leave for a month in December. One day, I saw from the first floor that the cook of the Ashrama, Hiramani, walked limping while holding his left part of the stomach. Upon inquiry, I found that he had developed hernia. I informed the Manager swami that without treatment, the poor man may succumb to hernia. It was decided then that he should be sent with the doctor to our Banaras Sevashrama. It was done, and he underwent a surgery and got completely cured in due course.

I had a wonderful time at Mayavati. I have heard from our elders that Swami Brahmanandaji would say, ‘To be posted to Mayavati is really a great good fortune. It is a prize posting.’ Really, there is no parallel to Mayavati. It is no doubt pure and holy. First of all it is in the Himalayas. Secondly, Swamiji stayed there, Turiyanandaji was there for quite a long time, and many others like Baburam Maharaj and Mahapurush Maharaj were also there. Mayavati is a place of *tapasya*. We get a lot of time for spiritual practices here.

Once, it was a dark night. I was sitting in the veranda of the first floor, covered all over with a blanket. I heard the sound of rustling leaves coming from the mountain opposite us. I felt as if it was coming from somewhere very near by. In the darkness, you could feel that the trees were all standing in silence. It is said in the Upanishads, ‘Silent like the trees.’² It would appear as if the trees were all in meditation. The Swarupnananda Point [*ku-tiya*, or the place where Swarupnanandaji used to practice meditation] was a little untidy. It was cleaned, and I would go there and practice meditation for some days. I would spend

2. *vrkṣa iva stabdhah*

—*Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, 12.13

my days there and come back in the evenings. One day, I had come to the Ashrama in the forenoon, thinking that I must have a bath and food before going there again. When I returned to the Point, I was surprised to find that my *japamala* box was missing—only the *japamala* was there. Cowherd boys come there; possibly, they had seen the plastic box and made it their own.

It was Mahapurush Maharaj's birth anniversary. Shambhu Maharaj (Pavananandaji) and myself left the Ashrama in the early hours of the day, even before dawn, and sat down on a hillside in Champawat. It was cold season and all over the place, we could see frost. We could make balls out of the frost and throw it. It would melt, however, if kept in the hand for long.

In December, it would rain. First, there would be noisy clouds; next, it would rain heavily; later, all would be silent. When there was snowfall, it would be white all over. That was a wonderful sight. We would go for walks every evening. I have heard it said that even Swamiji would walk daily. So, it is a tradition in Mayavati to walk. To the west of the Ashrama is Dharamgarh, above the hills. From Dharamgarh, one can see the snow peaks very clearly. Swamiji had been there, walking. He was so moved with the serene atmosphere of the place that he had commented thus: 'Here, in this undisturbed, uninterrupted silence, there must be a *kutiya* for meditation.' Owing to absence of water facilities, a habitable *kutiya* could not, however, be built as yet. But in 1997, a shaded meditation corner was built.

I went for a walk one day with Pavananandaji. With me were the two brothers—Firoz Gandhi and Sevak Gandhi. Both were disciples of Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj. It was getting dark and we were returning. On the way, we heard the roar of a tiger. Sevak Gandhi, who was talking to Pavana-

nandaji, suddenly disappeared. Where has Sevak gone, we wondered and began looking for him. It was already dark and the road was slippery too. Sevak had slipped and gone down. He was stuck between a pine and some bushes. We heard his voice: 'Shambhu-dā, I am here.' He was lifted up with the help of ropes and *chadars*, tied from end to end.

Sri Ramakrishna has said that one can do whatever one likes, with the knowledge of Advaita in one's pocket. Swamiji wanted the Mayavati Ashrama to be a special centre of Advaita sadhana. But, in all other centres, Swamiji wanted his followers 'to teach a little Bhakti, Bhajan (worship) and practical Advaitism' 'for the benefit of the general public.' However, he wanted this Advaita Ashrama to be specifically a centre dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone—for the practice and propagation of Advaita Vedanta. Practical Advaita is taught in other centres of the Ramakrishna Order also, but it is a mixture of rituals like formal worship and Advaita there. In this Ashrama, it is done without any connection with formal practices of devotion. Many a time, formal worship sucks our energy totally, or it makes us forget the main purpose and exerts weakening influences on our minds. Therefore, Swamiji wanted at least one centre where the ideal of Advaita could be kept pure, without the links of ritualism. Mayavati is the fulfilment of this ideal. The ashramites and visitors should not spend time in rituals here, but think always in this manner: 'I am not the body or mind or the *indriyas*. I am the immortal, everlasting, all-powerful Self which is infinite love and knowledge. All human beings and animals I see in front, behind, on all sides, everywhere—is that one Self alone.' This must not only be thought about, but also put into practice. Specially, one has to love and serve everyone with this ideal in view. The Advaita Ashrama should not only be a place of ideal knowledge, it should also be a place of ideal work. Therefore, as one of the chief activities

of the Advaita Ashrama, there is the *Prabuddha Bharata*, a journal loved immensely by Vivekananda, and also the literature of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. These latter ones are means for the service of God or Self in human beings through the propagation of spiritual knowledge. There is a hospital, which serves God in the jivas—the diseased and disabled are served by provision of medicines, diet and treatment. In the first annual report of the Mayavati Ashrama, mention is made of a school—the Ashrama ran a primary school where poor children could study without spending money. Later on, since many schools came up near by, this was closed down.

Though there are no rituals at Mayavati, there is ample scope for singing *bhajans* and during *ekādaśī* days, there is the singing of *Rāmnām*. However, Rama's picture is not kept during the singing. It is said that it was Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj who introduced the singing of *Rāmnām* at the Ashrama. The helpers (paid workers) of the Ashrama also participate in the singing, and all eat together later.

While I was at Mayavati, I noticed that the cooks did not eat what they cooked for us. They would prepare thick chapatis separately for themselves. One day, I tried to eat such chapatis, but could not.

In passing, I must mention some of the dignitaries who have visited Mayavati during these one hundred years. I have heard that

among the many other great people, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, the great artist Nandalal Bose, Sister Christine, Nivedita, and others have stayed in the Ashrama guest house. In fact, there is a new guest house now in Mayavati. I had been there during its inauguration in 1989. That was my third visit to the centre. I had been there for the second time in 1973. Later on, I went once again. In 1993 I stayed there for about a week and that was my fifth visit.

There is a tradition of keeping dairy in the Advaita Ashrama of Mayavati. The Mayavati brotherhood has been formed by Vivekananda. This brotherhood is founded on mutual trust, love, understanding and oneness. After having stayed there for one year, the brotherhood did not like my going away from there. But I had to go down to Calcutta because I was to receive my Sannyasa vows that year itself. If I went down, I would not be able to return to Mayavati, or so I had thought. It was a trying time. At the same time, my leave was also coming to an end. Before I left for Mayavati, Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj had asked me: 'When will you return?' So, I had to return. Thus, that was the end of my stay at Mayavati during my first visit. I came down to the plains in February 1948.

Whoever is deeply spiritual and is interested in spiritual practices will benefit by going to Mayavati. Where else will one get such an atmosphere, conducive to spiritual practices and meditation? □

Approach to Truth in Vedanta

(continued from page 474)

scribed as extracting one incomprehensible from another incomprehensible.⁷

This is what Vedanta calls *māyā*. It does not mean that the world does not exist. It is

what Sankara says in his *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* (verse 109): '*mahādbhutā anirovacaniya rūpā*, a great wonder or mystery, and of the nature of uncertainty or indeterminacy.' □

Reminiscences of Mayavati

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

We are grateful to Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, for sending us his memoirs of Mayavati. We get here a beautiful picture of Mayavati life in the 40's.

I was just a beginner in monastic life when I was sent to Mayavati. It was in 1941. I had heard a lot about the place and had come to know that it was a heaven on earth. I had also read about Swami Vivekananda's interest in Mayavati. Very senior swamis had congratulated me, saying, 'You have a prized posting.' All this had made me very enthusiastic.

I started from Calcutta by train and reached Lucknow via Varanasi, where I met Revered Swami Achalanandaji, who inspired me a lot. From Lucknow (the Ashrama was then in Aminabad), I again took a train to reach Tanakpur. In those days, one could not even imagine roads on the mountainous regions. So, there were no vehicles also. A pony had been sent with the ponyman to carry the luggage and myself. The train was late, and so, I had to spend the night in some place in Tanakpur. Next day we reached Shyamala Tal. I met Most Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj there. I spent the night at the Shyamala Tal Ashrama, and the next day, we started our journey upwards again. It was a wonderful scene all around: trees, grass, and birds and animals. There was no knowing when a tiger, a leopard, or a bear would come and attack us. Anyway, we continued. We also had to cross the Chalthi river. Unlike these days, when there is a bridge on it, there was nothing then, and so, we had to carefully wade through the waters. We climbed the hills until it was late afternoon, and reached a dak-bungalow. It was a small bungalow at Deori and the occupants were only the pony-

man and myself. All around, I could see mountain ranges. The next day, we climbed further up and walked through the deep Banlekh forest. It was a dense forest, infested with wild animals. So, we moved closely and cautiously. In the afternoon we were on Dharamgarh, from where the ponyman showed me the Ashrama I was to reach. Amidst the mountains, in a valley, I saw a few houses — that was Mayavati Ashrama. We reached the Ashrama almost in the evening. There were a few monks there at that time; Swami Pavitranandaji was the President of the centre, Swami Vipulanandaji was the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, and among others were Narayan Maharaj (Swami Vandananandaji), Doctor Maharaj (Sachin Maharaj), Shantaswarupanandaji (Parvati Maharaj) and Aparnanandaji (Satya Maharaj). They all affectionately took me in. My legs were paining a lot, having walked for so long. They advised me to immerse my feet in hot water. I had to do so for two consecutive days for the pain to go.

Mayavati was a remarkable place then, as it is now. All about the three sides, there are green mountains, opening only on one side showing snow peaks from end to end. The Ashrama stands at such a place from where Trishul, Nandakot, Nandadevi, Panchachulli, and other important peaks are visible. The Ashrama has two buildings: the main Ashrama building, and the *Prabuddha Bharata* office—both separated from each other by a garden. The garden is traditionally maintained by monks.

The name Mayavati comes from the word 'Maipot'—Mother's place. Maipot is a local term. This name is associated with a local deity. As you go down towards the Ashrama, under a tree, there is a small stone, which used to be worshipped by the local people. It is from this deity that the place has acquired its name.

The life in the Mayavati Ashrama had a grandness about it. In the morning, up to the tea-bell, there would be silence. One could not know if there were human beings there at all! Though the facilities for personal cleanliness were poor, and we had to go quite some distance for all that, there would be no noise. With the ringing of the tea-bell, monks would assemble in the hall of the main building which also had a library in it. It is called the *Gol Kamara*. After tea and some refreshments, which of course, had to be prepared by us, we would begin our respective activities. Swami Vipulananda, the then editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, was from Ceylon, and had certain specialities of his own. He loved music—specially that of his region; if he began singing or humming songs, no one could stop him from doing that. He would forget his tea, breakfast, food, and so on. One of the elderly monks would force him to come down from the editorial office for food. Even when he sat for food, he would keep humming, to the amusement of all. The biting cold of Mayavati made many very cautious, so to say. Vipulanandaji was no exception. He would not take bath for 2/3 days. And, after some elderly monk would remark about it, he would sit in the sun, begin applying oil, and this ritual would continue the whole day.

After Vipulanandaji's term was over, Swami Gambhiranandaji became the editor of the journal. This swamiji was a master of any situation: he was so punctual that one could adjust one's watch by observing his routine. I was asked to assist in the editorial work. I would correct proofs etc. Having been

a fresher from college, I would feel that sometimes there were some errors in grammar, syntax, and so on in certain articles. When I pointed this out once to Swami Gambhiranandaji, he said: 'You see, I have completed my studies long back. You are free to correct mistakes, if you find any.' Such was the liberty he gave us.

There was no electricity, and amenities were few. Food was very simple: occasionally, we would venture to prepare a delicacy and enjoy a small feast. We also had outings sometimes, though not very often. The outings were confined mostly to visiting Lohaghat once in a few months. That was also not as it is now—it was a village, with some shopping places, but we would visit Sri Devi Dutta Punetha's house and drink tea there on the way. And then, we had picnics sometimes—say, once or twice a year. To our joy, even Swami Gambhiranandaji would participate in such picnics. We would go to some nearby place, cook, and spend some time there. We would also go around in the deep forest with one Piyaarilal, the 'gunman'.

We would occasionally have some guests at the Ashrama, and there was a small guest house to accommodate them. The number of such visitors was very less, and ladies were—during my stay there—never seen getting permission to stay there. During the years of my stay in Mayavati, we had very honoured guests like Sri Nandalal Bose, the artist, Sri Shantidev Ghosh of Ravindra Sangeet fame, and Sri Vinayak Masoji, the versatile instrumental musician. Oh! It was a wonderful time, and we would listen to the musicians' performances as well as see the great artist drawing sketches so remarkably well. They stayed there for 8/10 days.

I have mentioned before about the silence that the Ashrama experienced before the tea-bell in the morning. It was the same after the evening-bell too. Until the supper-

bell was heard, there would be no sound at all in the Ashrama. Everyone would sit in meditation for hours. When it snowed, the silence would be so profound that even the heartbeat would be considered disturbing! And when it snowed, the whole area would be covered with a celestial brilliance. A soothing light enveloped the entire region during such periods. We would roll balls out of snow and it was a good pastime for us.

Life in the Mayavati Ashrama was so serious in those days, but we also had sufficient fun. Every night, after supper, we used to sit together for sometime and share jokes, narrate ghost stories, etc. On Sundays, we would play ludo, with Sri Mohan Lal Shah as leader excitedly shouting, 'Chalo Gla.'

Even though the Ashrama was dedicated to Advaita Vedanta and so, worship and other rituals were not practised, we had ample scope to sing *bhajans*. There was an organ, which formerly belonged to Mother Sevier. We would play on the organ and sing.

Cooking was another of our interesting diversions. The menu was almost always the same. With a highly conservative manager at the helm of affairs, we could not even prepare what little we could in such a remote place. There were times, however, when the Manager-Swami would go down to Tanakpur for marketing. At such times, someone else

would act as manager and we would have some freedom; it was on such occasions that we had fun, preparing either some sweet or some other thing. There was no stove or any such appliance. It was a hard time, blowing the firewood until it caught fire. Tears would roll down the eyes when one tried to light the fire. But even Swami Pavitranandaji was seen preparing sweets.

Mother Sevier's bungalow is down below. There is a road in front of it with tall Deodars. It was a luxury, walking on that road. There was also a huge, grand and majestic eucalyptus tree near the cowshed. Swami Turiyanandaji's oak tree, just behind the main Ashrama building, also needs special mention here. All these are witnesses to the history of the place.

I was in Mayavati for 3 years. It was an education and experience to me to live in such a place, with so many elderly monks. The simple yet austere life-style, the sweet mixing of seriousness and fun, the intellectual and spiritual training—all have left a lasting impression on my mind. When I see the rapid changes taking place in the Ashrama now, along with the changes taking place in the Himalayan region itself—roads everywhere, vehicles all over the mountains, electricity, telephone, radio, and so on—I feel that the earlier days were better, grander and glorious. □

CORDIAL GREETINGS

On 30 March 1699, Guru Gobind Singhji created the Khalsa.



We convey our hearty greetings to the people of Punjab on the occasion of the tercentenary of the creation of the Khalsa.

Next month,
we shall publish a special article about what the Khalsa is and how it was created.

Stray Thoughts on Advaita Ashrama

SWAMI JYOTIRUPANANDA

Swami Jyotirupanandaji is presently the head of our Moscow Vedanta centre. He was earlier a monastic inmate of the Advaita Ashrama. Upon request, he has kindly sent the memoirs of his stay at Advaita Ashram.

The Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the Himalayas has a unique place in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement. It was the fulfilment of a cherished dream which Swami Vivekananda had during his travel in the Alps mountains of Europe, where he resolved to start a monastery in the secluded place of the Himalayas. Curiously enough, a similar thought arose many years later in the mind of a famous Russian painter, philosopher and humanist by name Nicholas Roerich who drew hundreds of wonderful paintings of the Himalayas expressing the spiritual dimension in them. He also established a centre in the Kulu valley of the Himalayas in order to bring about a union of Arts, Science and Religion, drawing inspiration from the lofty Himalayas. He also drew a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna with the title *Bhagavan* and placed him on the lap of the Himalayas. What better place could he have found on earth for Sri Ramakrishna other than the Himalayas, the very soul of God! The unique ideals of Advaita Vedanta which Swami Vivekananda embodied needed to be brought down to the practical level as desired by Swamiji himself, seeing Brahman in human beings and then everywhere, based on a deep conviction of the Oneness of Existence. This should be reflected in every action. To put these ideas into practice—never done anytime before—a befitting place needed to be searched out, and Swami Vivekananda made the unique choice of selecting a place in the heart of the Himalayas.

The Himalayas is the spiritual home of

the Vedic Aryans in whose forests the supreme knowledge of the Vedas was given forth for the first time. The ever-present Himalayas always reminded India, generation after generation, of the supreme truths of the Vedas. These truths, or in other words, these lofty ideals of the Advaita Vedanta, which were never known anywhere in the world, were revealed here to the pure mind of the ancient Rishis. The Himalayas as the witness has remained the constant source of inspiration to seekers of the supreme Reality.

Therefore, having been the fountain-head of the perennial ideals of Vedanta the Himalayas rightly deserve a centre for Vedanta learning. Swami Vivekananda sized up this ideal in his unique way thus: 'In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of Man; knowing Him—and therefore the Universe—as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to Infinite Freedom.'¹

This world as we see—as different from Brahman—is the effect of name and form, born out of our ignorance, which is called Maya. We are to get out of this state to know that Brahman alone is real through the help of this very Maya in its benign form which Sri Ramakrishna termed as *Vidyā Māyā*.

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 5, p. 435.

Therefore, to translate the lofty ideals of Advaita Vedanta in life, the Himalayas is the best suitable place, away from the pull of social obligations, away from the din and bustle of society, where the sublime gravity of Nature helps us raise our mind to that aloofness and develop this spiritual attitude to immerse the mind in the supreme Brahman. Freeing the mind from social and other involvements, and merging the ego in Brahman, we are to attain the freedom of the self. Sri Ramakrishna tells us, 'Attain Brahma-jnana and then roam about enjoying God's lila.'² One may pass one's whole life and may not reach to that height at all. In that case we may strive to attain a little lower ideal. To quote Swami Vivekananda from the poem, *To the Awakened India*:

...Be bold, and face
The Truth! Be one with it!
Let visions cease,
Or, if you cannot,
dream but truer dreams,
Which are Eternal Love and
Service Free.³

In order to ascend to the highest state, our initial step should be assimilation of the ideal of Advaita Vedanta through regular study and meditation. Practice of meditation must take us to that depth of mind where body-consciousness goes. Rituals are always at the level of the body and the senses. So, by keeping away rituals at Mayavati, in the Himalayan heights, we try to keep ourselves above this level from the very beginning. The principles of Advaita Vedanta, the attitude of Oneness towards Nature and man must be cultivated in all possible ways. Eternal love and service to all, freeing the mind from any other motivation is the object of the external part of our practice. Caste, creed, religion or any other divisive ideas are to be shunned

completely to get an access to the infinite Brahman existing in every person and everywhere. People are to be served without forgetting that Brahman is the essence in them, waiting for manifestation. Our care for, or treatment to, plants and animals should also be governed by this attitude. Selfless service or any good work is always good. It will lead us through interaction in public relations to the state of mind where we can grasp the psychological aspect of our mind and understand vividly how far we have achieved the principles of love and oneness of the Self.

Once I had a talk with the late Swami Abhayanandaji who visited Advaita Ashrama, Mavavati, in the 1970s after a long gap of time. He was there in its early period and did a lot to make that place, which was a forest, habitable. He expressed his great satisfaction seeing the Ashrama well established. But another day he expressed his great regret that the centre was not maintained properly. I reminded him his early statement of satisfaction. He confessed that his visit to the place after a long time brought him satisfaction, no doubt. But, he was pained to see that some memorable trees had been cut down to make space for further construction. His thought perhaps was that Nature too was to be treated with love, respect and consideration when we are cherishing the spirit of Oneness everywhere.

It is not easy to translate this lofty ideal of Oneness in life and thereby to develop such outlook in every action. Brave souls should come forward to accept this powerful spirit which can bring the needful transformation to the modern civilization. Acquiring this spirit of Vedanta ourselves in Mayavati, we are to spread it in such a way that people, specially those who come there and witness the real application of the perennial ideals of ancient India of the Vedic age, must be inspired too. We must remember that Swami Vivekananda's uniqueness was that it was he

2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 776.

3. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 389.

who wanted this ideal of Advaita Vedanta to reach everyone—from the child to the old man—without any sort of distinction, for raising India to the place it deserves. Should not the Advaita Ashrama of our generation take up this responsibility on its shoulders?

The Advaita Ashrama has achieved a lot in this direction during its past hundred years. I can cite one life which has left an indelible impression on the minds of many of us. It was that of Swami Abhayanandaji, who lived for one hundred years, maintaining this ideal of Advaita Vedanta throughout his life. He did not bend his head to anything else till the last day of his life. At the same time, we saw him loved by one and all who came in contact with him. He was a repository of love. We saw swamis like Madhavananda, Gambhirananda, Vireswarananda and others, who imbibed the ideal of Advaita Ve-

danta at Mayavati and dedicated themselves to propagating the message of Vedanta through their lives and writings, which are of great importance. Now, books on Vedanta and books on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, who were the perfect examples of the ideals of Vedanta, published by the Advaita Ashrama are inspiring millions of people all over the world. The journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, or Awakened India, which was started by Swami Vivekananda celebrated its centenary in 1995 and has reached all corners of the world, laden with most valuable articles contributed by the best thinkers of the world. In the field of physical service, the Mayavati Charitable Hospital is doing great service to the poor patients of the Himalayas.

I hope that this ashrama will be of greater service to humanity in the years to come. □

From Next Month!

A New Series!

RELIGION AND LIFE



SWAMI BHUTESHANANDAJI'S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Order, would everyday reply to various questions by admirers who met him. The topics ranged from spiritual life to individual's problems. A select record of them will be serialised.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

एषोऽणुरात्मा चेतसा वेदितव्यो
यस्मिन्प्राणः पञ्चधा संविवेश।
प्राणैश्चित्तं सर्वमोतं प्रजानां
यस्मिन्विशुद्धे विभवत्येष आत्मा॥
Eṣo'ṇur-ātmā cetasā veditavyo
yasmin-prāṇaḥ pañcadhā saṁviveśa;
Prāṇaiś-cittaṁ sarvam-otaṁ prajānām
yasmin-viśudhhe vibhavaty-
eṣa ātmā. (III.i.9)

The subtle soul (Atman) is to be realized in the body into which has entered the five-formed vital force which pervades the entire mind as well as the motor and sensory organs of all creatures. And It (is to be known) by the mind, which being purified, the Self shines forth.

To reach that goal we have to manage our limited resources during this lifetime, ie, our *ahamkāra* and mind and its thoughts have to be disciplined as mentioned again in this mantra. The *aṇu* or atomic Atman means It is the most subtle of the subtle, not easily known or understandable. It must be experienced (*veditavyam*) by our consciousness (*cetasā*). Sri Ramakrishna says that in the almanac (*pañcāṅga*) it is predicted that it is to rain, but, if you squeeze the almanac, not a drop will fall from it. Similarly, having understood the Upaniṣads intellectually, we are convinced that the Self exists—the Essence of the universe is in me as much as in everything else. But we have not experienced It, nor become one with It. All this conviction is in the domain of intellectual gymnastics. That is why it is said that It is very, very small, and subtle—known intellectually, but yet not within our grip; It slips out of our grasp. Intellectual knowledge might satisfy the ego, but it will not stand in good stead, nor give equanimity and poise when we are face to face with death. Śaṅkarācārya says that all *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage) can be visited,

including the Gangasagar, etc; you may have lived a disciplined life, doing your ordained duty with austerities such as fasting, etc; you may be charitable (*dāni*), you may have widened your heart to feel the misery around you and tried to remove it in every way you can but *jñāna vihinē sarvam-anena muktir-na bhavati janma śatena*—all these things being done, still without the knowledge of the Self, there is no liberation even if you are born a hundred times.

Though *aṇu* means It is very subtle, yet it does not mean that It is unknown, for It is known as 'I am'. 'I am', only I have not experienced this 'I' as the universal 'I', being very deeply identified with one's name and form. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that we teach our pet parrot the name of God, but once a cat catches the parrot, it squeaks, forgetting the name of God. We also do the same because our faith is shallow. However much we may speak of the lofty ideas intellectually, yet in a crunch we forget them and squeak out our true belief. Our understanding has to be taken forward from the intellectual level to the direct experience of Its nature. The *dhāyamānaḥ* of the previous mantra is here linked up with *cetasā veditavyam*.

Where is It to be found?—there, in the body, where the five life-breaths (*prāṇa, apāna, vyāna, udāna, samāna*) are working within us. The life-forces are five in number as these cater to five types of activities. All these activities in the living system are balanced by the *pañca-prāṇas*. Also, the intelligence of all beings depends on this fivefold vital-force. And the intellect pervades the mind and the five organs of perception and the five organs of action. When the mind is pervaded by a purified intellect, then the self-shining Atman reveals itself distinctly. So, to find It one must

dive deep into one's being where the *pañca-prāṇas* are operating.

यं यं लोकं मनसा संविभाति

विशुद्धसत्त्वः कामयते यांश्च कामान्।

तं तं लोकं जयते तांश्च कामां-

स्तस्मादात्मज्ञं ह्यर्चयेद्भुतिकामः॥

Yam Yam lokam manasā samvibhāti

viśuddha-sattvaḥ kāmāyate yānś-ca kāmān;

Tam tam lokam jayate tānś-ca kāmām-

stasmād-ātmajñam hy-arcayed-bhūti-kāmah.

(III.i.10)

Whatever world the man of purified mind desires and whatever enjoyment he covets for himself, he wins. Therefore, one who is desirous of (spiritual) prosperity should adore the Knower of the Self.

Up till this time, all the mantras have emphasized *puruṣākāra*—*tapasyā* and *sadhana*—but this last mantra of this section describes the powers and attainments of the knower of Atman (*ātma-jñāni*).

Viśuddha sattva means one who has purified his very being; his nature is one with Atman or Brahman; he is a liberated soul, a *mukta-puruṣa*. Whatever he wishes to have, that very *loka* or level of consciousness is available to him. But what is the logic behind this power of his? Because he himself has become the universe. What has been earned by him, belongs to him and so the entire universe is within his capacity to possess. He can ask for any enjoyable object he likes, and he will get it. 'By the grace of the Divine Mother, I keep on rowing my boat from the fifth level of awareness to the seventh,' said Sri Ramakrishna when he was in a state of ecstasy which he could not conceal. He was then in his *saccidānanda svarūpa*. Then he came down to the normal level and through his teaching and example taught others also how to attain *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He had mastery over every level of awareness; so he was free to attain and stay in any level of awareness he liked.

Such people can give these very levels of consciousness to another who desires this alone and nothing else. God will listen to his devotees if he joins the three intense desires of the world, viz, the love of an attached

person to the things of the world, the mother's love for her child, and the intense devotion of a chaste wife for her husband. If such intense desire is directed towards the Divine, the Divine is bound to come to the devotee. A disciple once came to the guru and asked him to give him the *darśana* (vision) of God. The guru took the disciple to the river for a bath, caught him by the neck and held his head under water till he ran out of breath and struggled hard to get his breath. He told his guru that he had almost killed him. The guru replied that when one struggled in the same way, then only one would get the *darśana* of God.

Apart from self-effort (*puruṣākāra*) in the form of disciplinary procedures enunciated earlier, another method is to seek the compassion of the realized soul, who, because he has realized the Self within himself, has the potential ability to transform another person. This is the concept of *guru-vāda*. The recipient, however, must put forth his best effort and try to make himself worthy of God's compassion by becoming one who desires nothing else than his own personal good (*ātma-kalyāṇa*), that is, by desiring the knowledge of the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna said that the breeze of God's compassion is ever blowing. Instead of blaming God, put up your sails to receive it, ie, qualify yourself to receive His grace. This harmonizes the concept of self-effort—of doing one's best—and the compassion and grace we receive when we ask God to help us. Thus *puruṣākāra* and surrender to God (*śaraṇāgati*) are blended together.

This last mantra now enters the domain of Indian spiritual ethos and says that the realized soul, who has attained Oneness with the universe, can bestow on another person, equally qualified, any fruits of his own efforts and achievements. Therefore, he who is desirous of his own spiritual welfare should habitually praise and worship such a realized soul. The *jijñāsu*, the true inquirer, the seeker of knowledge, shows reverence to the *ātma-jñāni*, and we, being such people, should do so.

(to be continued)

Acceptance

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

Here is an attempt by the former editor of the Prabuddha Bharata to convince readers of the need of the real acceptance of all faiths as true.

Acceptance is a very commonly used word, though it is often uncommon in human behaviour. We use this word in the field of religion, and say that we accept all religions as true. What do we mean by 'acceptance of all religions as true'?

Though it is regrettably true that many do not understand their own religion well enough to comment coherently on it, they do — it is a sad thing to say—try to judge the beliefs of other religions and religionists. There are persons who pass judgements which show a thorough lack of understanding of the tenets of the other religions; there are also persons who quote others as making such comments, themselves being afraid to make such statements; there are a few others who, in an attempt at trying to justify the tenets of the alien religion refer frequently to those incorrect statements made by the uninformed. There are those who will not budge an inch from the convictions of the religion in which they are born to and try to accept other religions only insofar as they preach what they themselves believe in, what in mathematics is termed as the intersection of two sets. Where the two religions do not agree, such people stick to their own beliefs and condemn the practices of those who do not conform to their convictions. That to them is acceptance of the other religion.

Says the believer of religion R1, read our scriptures S1 only and not the scriptures S2 of religion R2. Why, you may ask. S2 contains what is already found in S1, so why go in for the study of S2?, or S2 contains beliefs not sanctioned by S1, so then you should not be reading S2.

Acceptance is none of this. That is why even though asserting the ideal of acceptance in writings or speeches, many tend to voice views unconsciously revealing non-acceptance. That is a contradiction to be sure: there is variance between what the lips utter and what the mind feels. That has to be checked. There is scope enough for criticising every religion by placing stress on certain of their beliefs. No religion is perfect, but then no religion is a mere fancy either. They were all ushered into existence by the will of God. Every religion has many facets which are full of splendour like a collection of gems. The man of acceptance tries to pick these gems and see how effectively he may utilize these for his own spiritual growth. The followers of many religions have often misinterpreted the sayings of their own masters in a way they understood them and have split themselves into various sects, sometimes even coming to blows. When we interpret the sayings of a master of some religious denomination, we must understand that it is merely our reading of it. Only the master understands what he means; he alone knows what other masters who were before him have spoken. One such proclaimed: All jackals howl alike.' But then the central truth of all religious experience though the same, its application varies according to the needs of the time. Therefore, religions appear to be in conflict and religionists fight each other forgetting that they all basically follow the same thought.

Then there are religionists who believe that the test of their religion's truth lies in the number of its followers. Religion is not for the masses as a group; it is for each individual. It

is the experience of one's real nature, of a Power, external in the beginning and internal finally, that can save one from the bondage one imagines to be in. Understood so, each and every religion has in it the requisite potency to take one to freedom. Normally, we do not understand this strength inherent in every religion, for we do not stop for a moment to realize that many have had spiritual experiences through every form of religious practice. Another reason for this lack of understanding is that we have not reached the goal of human life through the religion into which we are born. Had we, then we could also have experimented with other religious methods and seen that they all take one to that very goal. Such an experiment was conducted by Sri Ramakrishna after he realized the Divine Mother in the image of Bhavatarini at Dakshineswar and the result of his discovery was: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' What stood in the way of one's reaching the goal was to be given up. No religion ever preached that one could have both this world and God. The world has to be given up and the mind given to God alone; the world may be accepted later in a renewed way, as a manifestation of God. What is required is to renounce the worldview we have at present and cover the world with God as the *Īśa Upaniṣad* says.

All religions lay stress on the cultivation of purity of mind, the giving up of 'me and mine' and all the desires lurking in the mind

which are meant to satisfy this 'me and mine'. The pure mind is like a lake which is not ruffled by waves. Clear of scum, the lake permits its bottom to be viewed in which one finds many a jewel. When ruffled by waves or when the surface is covered with thick scum, the bottom of the mind-lake is no longer visible. A pure mind free from distractions is essential for spiritual pursuit and that is what the beginner keeps struggling for, for what seems to be an eternity. The pure mind, the pure intellect and the pure Atman are the same. Once the mind becomes pure and the intellect discriminative, nothing prevents the mind from being attached to one's true nature. The discriminating mind knows truly what is real and what is unreal, what is to be accepted and what is to be given up.

When one understands that all religions take their followers to the same goal, then there is no attempt to compare one's religion with those of others to establish the supremacy of one's own religion. Rather one becomes very broad and wishes that everyone progresses in the path chosen by him or her. My religion is good for me and that does not necessarily mean that it would be good for you, because constitutionally you and I are different. Such is the liberality in religion one expresses. One also accepts every practitioner of religion as a fellow traveller on the religious path. □

Lord Mahāvira

Vardhamana, known also as Mahavira, meaning supreme spiritual hero, whose birth anniversary is celebrated this month (on the 29th), was the last one of the twenty-four tirthaṅkaras. He was born in sixth century BC of kṣatriya parents, near Vaiśālī. He renounced the world at the age of twenty-eight and thereafter practised austerities and meditation for twelve years, at the end of which time he was spiritually illumined. Then for thirty years he preached his doctrines to people. Mahavira popularized the doctrine of ahimsā and in so doing, made his chief contribution to the spread of Jainism. He also organized the community into two classes, monks and householders, and the division into digambaras and śvetāmbaras was a later development. The chief scriptures of the Jains are Aṅgas, Pūrvās and Prakīrṇa.

We extend our hearty greetings to our Jain brotherhood on this happy occasion.

—adapted from *The Spiritual Heritage of India*

Look Within: Paradigm Shift in Education in a Liberalized Economy

DR. R. P. BANERJEE

In this article Dr. R.P. Banerjee highlights the age-old philosophical questions: What is the purpose of education? What should be the ultimate aim of education? While dealing with these questions, he lays stress on the personality of both the teacher and the taught. He says that an integrated personality alone can provide wisdom teaching. Unless the teaching is from a consciousness wise enough, one cannot expect any perceptible effect on the character of the taught.

Education, in the modern age, is considered mainly as a tool and a technique to build up a career. It is considered as the art of gathering certain information and cultivating certain principles, through structures and formats, to amass some defined varieties of skill. With the economic liberalization gaining momentum in India, views on education are changing more towards careeristic pursuits.

There was a time when it was usually said, 'Education generates humility.' Nowadays, this is almost forgotten. Respect for elders and teachers is rapidly diminishing. Instead of acquiring an intrinsic quality like humility, educated people are becoming arrogant, non-compassionate, egotistic and self-seeking. Instead of becoming dignified, noble and generous, they are gradually becoming mean-minded, narrow-visioned and crooked. Careeristic pursuit makes the educated use the resources of a developing country like India for personal growth, and then flying to the developed wonderland they feel more homely so as to make their contributions there. This is surely a concern for those living in this country.

What is the basic drive that makes educated people behave like this? Is it a problem of the structure of our society or the infrastructure? Or, is it a problem relating to the basic outlook on education? The author believes that the problems which we are con-

fronting today are more concerning ideals of education than structures, systems and procedures. It is proposed to highlight the goals of education suited to the tradition of India, as required in the liberalized economic scenario.

Education is the manifestation of the perfection which is already within, said Swami Vivekananda a century ago. Some scholars look upon education as the quest for inner experience. The view held by ancient Greeks was different. According to Plato, education was, 'learning to think for oneself under the guidance of a teacher.'¹ This ability to think does not come suddenly. It is acquired by effort and, as mentioned, with the help of a mentor who can direct these efforts. Education was perceived by Socrates as some kind of perpetual learning that is imparted to the immortal soul. 'The process of learning is the remembering of things learnt in a previous existence, since forgotten.'² Bertrand Russell, while analysing the Greek view of education, says: 'On the educational aspect of the remembering process, we may note that the practice of psychoanalytic therapy is based precisely on the notion of re-awakening memories from the past.... In a wide

1. Bertrand Russell, *Wisdom of the West* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1960), p. 68.

2. Ibid., p. 69.

sense, education, for Socrates, is a therapy of the soul.³ Socrates believed in the immortality of the soul and that is why his view on education is similar to that of Swami Vivekananda mentioned above. The following affirmation hints at this: 'One of the great remedies to all social ills was seen in the provision of adequate education.'⁴ Views on education as prevalent in the ancient world and as it exists now differ widely. With the changes taking place in the economic, political and technological environment, views on education have also undergone dramatic changes. The great present problem of a technological society did not bother those who did not suffer the onslaught of the productive system inflicted on the masses. The prevailing views on education are that of learning something from outside with a calculated economic motive in mind. Education, now a commodity, can be traded, exchanged with a profit motive and capsuled for commerce. In a condition undergoing such techno-commercial changes, the outlook on education also undergoes rapid changes. Here we find a general deviation, wide enough from the principles of education pursued by the ancients.

Coming to our times, we find that the current system of education deviates widely from the traditional concept. The Indian tradition stands for an inside-out system which recognizes the existence of the Self, immortal and immanent in nature. The current system does not bring about this dimension within its purview. It is not only tradition-neutral but also tradition-negating.

The concept of the Self has been an essential feature of the Indian system of education. But this has been denied in the later phases of development in educational methods. With the past three centuries of western domination, India has produced a class of people, identified as 'allied corps' who are, by their life style and rituals, more western than In-

dian. The Indian tradition in education has thus not been followed by modern Indians.

In ancient times 'Moral training formed the very pivot and the backbone of the educational system, and the development of character was the one ideal that dominated it.'⁵ Moral training was for application in life. 'The knowledge aimed at in the Upanishads calls for the application of the whole life through all its stages.'⁶ This was aimed at developing inner discipline through brahmacharya: 'A brahmacharin requires to overcome passions like caste-pride, fame, sleep, anger, bragging, personal beauty and fragrance.'⁷ The final aim was to acquire the knowledge of the Atman through practice. 'The knowledge of the Atman cannot be gained by mere speculation concerning it, but only by revelation as the result of a proper degree of self-growth.'⁸ The student alone could not perform the practice, that is the reason why the role of a teacher (guru) was so important. 'The teacher is the central figure, the very pivot of the educational system with which the state had very little to do. He introduces the boy to student-ship, and is in sole charge of his moral, mental and physical upbringing.'⁹ All these reveal that in the whole educational system the main thrust was on character building.

In the modern world, career competition in education shifts the thrust away from character-building, thereby troubling the students and their parents. Even a child going to the kindergarten competes with his peers for success. This interpersonal competition, which is at the base of modern education, generates

3. Ibid., p. 69.

4. Ibid., p. 263.

5. R.C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988), Vol. 1, p. 520. [Hereafter, *History and Culture*.]

6. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, *Ancient Indian Education* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960), pp. 97-8.

7. Ibid., p. 95.

8. Ibid., p. 114.

9. *History and Culture*, p. 523.

impure faculties in the minds of students, and with their rise in career, these impurities also grow up.

The parents also foment negative thoughts in their offspring by repeatedly saying that unless they are able to secure something accredited as a landmark in their career, they are bound to lose the game. That means, they do not reach anywhere in the rat-race of life. The other side of the coin obviously appears before the parents. If the student fails to reach the top, the agony does not burn him or her only—the whole family bears the brunt. Life reduces to a chance, a gambling, where the successful few only rejoice and enjoy. With achievement and success becoming the aim of education, the basic tenets that contribute to character-formation are sidetracked. The student lacks in wisdom required of a person cultivating free thinking in general. Truth does not come the way of self-domination. The individual's drive for satisfying self-interest obviously leads him to the realm of the non-Truth. Therefore, the individual, when trying to succeed at all costs, forgets the eternal fact of the duality of existence. Success following or preceding failure is but natural. This conceptualization requires the support from the heart of the person. With an individual's inner core being polluted by selfish urges, tamasic and rajasic attributes like backbiting, jealousy, covetousness, lust, anger dominate the social organizations leading to stressful situations and problems of fragmentation. A holistic view of life does not grow out of a system where individuals lack in their perspectives and truthfulness. A fragmented personality may be a specialist in one field but also a pursuer of self-interest because it is this drive and cultivation of self-interest that makes the fragmentation more prominent.

This idea of specialized approach makes the process of understanding and realizing the inner Truth difficult. It leads individuals to depend upon outside objects. The process of exteriorization sets in. The individual becomes more and more exteriorized in this

approach. Exteriorized existence, one can easily contemplate, is against the principle of wisdom. But one can really imagine the importance of the integral self in human existence. Modern man, as he is away from the integrality, looks at the situation from the point of view of a specialist. A split or fragmented personality as he is, he lacks in the holistic vision. Holistic vision makes one look at the situation or a problem as it is—that is without the same being contaminated by personal bias.

Depersonification becomes the ultimate end of fragmentation. In other words, a fragmented personality becomes heartless, slowly and sometimes unknowingly yields to the pressure of information coming through the information super-highway. The information super-highway has contributed amazingly many things to the modern world including imparting knowledge through distant learning techniques. This enables the students living in one part of the world to come in contact with their counterparts on the other side. The exchange of curricula, exchange of faculties, exchange of knowledge, exchange of methodology are becoming a regular phenomena in educational systems. Even universality in the education system is not far. As the rate of exchange of faculties has been on the rise across the borders of nations, a teacher from one country having a particular background is now teaching students living in other countries with a different background. Visiting teachers are on the rise also. This gives an indication of their learning having no link with the lives lived by either the student or the teacher. The result is that the experiential part is denied to both the student and the teacher. The teacher declines to live his life according to the ideal he preaches; nor does the student want to live according to the ideal preached by the teacher. This is the major problem posed by the modern system of education.

With the advent of the British government in India, the educational reformist Ma-

caulay had proposed a new educational system for Indian students. This system was based upon the thrust of education culminating in a career and earning or encashing potentiality. Education was considered by Macaulay as a means to gather information. The point of living up to ideals was not highlighted in this educational system. Since the students become pursuers of their career only, the noble voice coming from the inner core of life is hardly heard in them. That means the economic consideration in life prevails over other ideals in education. Education not for self-realization, education not for wisdom, education not for illumination, education not for character-building—but for gaining some mileage in the economic advancement in life. In other words, Macaulay's educational system shifts the emphasis of Indian students to economic pursuit and away from building an ideal life based on the principles of brahmacharya and other traditional Indian values.

In the life of a student, the principle of brahmacharya is conducive to the cultivation of truthfulness and faith in oneself, character-building and self-realization, wisdom and illumination. These are the basic qualities required to become a complete man possessed of integrity, vision, self-confidence and humility.

Thus we find that it is not so much the question of a system but that of the character of the teacher and the student which is most important. This is supposed to be the central principle of education. Today, in the name of modernity, we are going to forget this noble principle of studentship, and more so in the period of economic liberalization in India. With economic liberalization setting in as a principle, one finds supportive providence from Macaulay's principles of education.

Of late we have heard of so many educational movements in India, but these movements are basically movements of teachers from economic considerations and do not really focus on education and value-orienta-

tion. Some demands which are mostly of a reformist type figure in those movements, but truly speaking these are just beautifying facial outlook only. Teachers consider themselves as just professionals striving to fulfil their own economic needs and achieve self-actualization in Maslovian sense.

How should we impart the ideal form of education to the students? What should the life of a teacher be? In the reports submitted by various education commissions in the past in India, nowhere do we find the mode of 'living' discussed in the context of education. There was a time when teachers earned respect in society. Teachers commanded respect from all concerned because they used to live a noble and dignified life, committed to the dissemination of knowledge. The ideals which were taught to the students in the ancient educational system were actually lived by the teachers. But unfortunately nowadays one can hardly distinguish a teacher from the common man leading an ultra-modern life. The teacher has lost the conscience of a teacher. He is no more the guru; he is afraid of students who are truth seekers, he is afraid of people who are living the life of truth and faith.

With truth and faith disappearing from the scenario at a fast rate, impure characters are coming in and causing fatal injury to team work, the principle of co-existence and the like. No matter what amount of skill is collated, a student does not contribute to the ultimate well-being of the society. Systems, structures, procedures, tools, techniques thus prove unproductive in the ultimate analysis.

The *Katha Upanishad* (1.2.4) speaks of the highest kind of pursuit in education: Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached. Yes, the goal has to be reached. But before one intends to reach it, the goal has to be defined. 'Goal setting', a term commonly used in management literature, is done through certain exercises and by following certain norms. Here, the goal of which the *Katha Upanishad* gives a hint is the one and the Supreme—the

realization of the highest. Education, at present, is devoid of a goal of that kind. The only goal is that of self-interest, satisfying individual ego and zooming in the materialistic pursuit of life. Career competition is also for the achievement of one's own career-goals.

Even while in the lower secondary and secondary schools, students are made to fix up goals like 'becoming an engineer, an administrator, a doctor, or a management graduate. The idea is that this kind of identity is all and the supreme to aspire for. One who is an engineer wants to be confined within the domain of engineering-identity; one who is a doctor always thinks of himself in that role. One's role is identified with the Self. Whether an engineer or a manager, he is, first of all, a man. The human identity can lift the person from the narrow horizons of fragmented role-comprehension to the integral self-identity. The question of teachers living upto ideals has been blatantly denied in intellectual fashion by an education committee very recently. While commenting on the subject 'Education and Integrity', the commission observes in its report:

Consider, for instance, the overriding problem of restoring and preserving morality and integrity in the educational sector. To suggest that ethical values must inform education in all its aspects is to mouth a cliché. By itself such preaching means little. Teachers may be exhorted to keep to the straight and narrow path of rectitude and adhere to the code of honour traditionally associated with the noble profession they have the privilege to belong to. But can rectitude be the exclusive practice of educators while the rest of the society rushes headlong in the opposite direction?¹⁰

It is a pity that an education commission, comprising of educationists of repute and tending to influence the future of Indian edu-

cation in particular and society at large, makes such a comment—which, in the ultimate analysis stands in defence of the prevailing unethicalness and role-governed, fragmented existence. This view reminds one of the warnings of Mahatma Gandhi against the pitfalls of education:

Almost from the commencement, the textbooks deal not with things the boys and the girls have always to deal with in their homes, but things to which they are perfect strangers.... The higher he goes, the farther removed he is from his home, so that at the end of his education he becomes estranged from his surroundings.... His education is calculated to wean him from his traditional culture. And if the masses of educated youths are not entirely denationalized, it is because the ancient culture is too deeply embedded in them to be altogether uprooted even by our education adverse to its growth.¹¹

Mahatma Gandhi's view of the pattern of education hints at the core concept of the forgotten inner Self, the immortality of which was envisaged by Socrates centuries ago and which forms the central theme of Indian heritage. The quest and pursuit of Self, as it formed the nucleus of education in ancient India, would remain the same if a person likes to live an ethico-moral life. In his or her pursuit of acquiring skill, the individual invariably forgets the basic integrity forming the core concept. The educated class, today, has fallen a prey to the 'greed' syndrome. The play of consumerism has had formidable impact on the educated masses only converting them into perpetual consumers. This is contributed by the pursuit of modern education. This aspect of modern man has been brilliantly outlined by Erich Fromm, when he says:

Modern man, if he dared to be articulate about his concept of heaven, would describe a vision which would look like the

10. *Report of the Education Commission*, Government of West Bengal, August 1992, p. 308.

11. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 1 September 1921.

biggest departmental store in the world, showing new things and gadgets, and himself having plenty of money with which to buy them. He would wander around open-mouthed in this heaven of gadgets and commodities, provided only that there were even more and newer things to buy, and perhaps that his neighbours were just a little less privileged than he.¹²

One educationist has put the problem in the context of roots and heritage as follows: '... the educational system failed to take root in the country at large, while it created a conflict of ideologies among a certain section of people who were brought up in it.'¹³

It cannot be denied that modern education negates the heritage of the country when it has replaced the spiritual principle of education by materialistic pursuits. Swami Vivekananda rightly puts it in this form: 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. ... The ideal, therefore, is that we must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as

practical.'¹⁴

By denying the heritage, culture and tradition of the country, one is trying to uproot the individuals and render the society into becoming fragmented in character. The goal has to be somewhat positive, which assimilates all kinds of progressive knowledge and ideas, and yet is based upon the eternal principles and ideals of our society. The goal of education, in the Indian context, is thus best explained and summed up in the Vedic prayer: 'From the unreal lead me to the Real. From darkness lead me to Light....'¹⁵

Whereas the short-term aim of education is to acquire knowledge and skill, to be equipped with information, the long-term aim should be deeper and linked with the traits of a civilization. Secular principles of life lay emphasis on systems, structures, procedures, and so on and promotes the economic aim of man. However, the central governing principle, in the Indian context, must be spiritual. All forms of education, be it science, technology or ethics, should begin with a spiritual note and find fulfilment in spiritual quest and attainments. This is the present day need for India and the rest of the world. □

12. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc, 1955), p. 135.

13. H.B. Mukherjee, *Education for Fullness* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 303-4.

14. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 3, p. 302.

15. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.3.28.

The Bane of Imitation

O India, this is your terrible danger. The spell of imitating the West is getting such a strong hold upon you that what is good or what is bad is no longer decided by reason, judgement, discrimination, or reference to the Shastras.... Alas! what can be a more tangible proof of foolishness than this?

—Swami Vivekananda

The Story of an Orphanage's Birth

B.N. SIKDAR

Sri B.N. Sikdar, formerly of the West Bengal Educational Service, describes in this article the genesis of the orphanage started by Swami Akhandananda about a century ago. He believes that basing on this institution 'many an institution on a similar pattern was founded in India' later on.

The genesis of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Sargachhi must be sought in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. The saint delivered a message, which, a French humanist thought, was 'the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.'¹ This message couched in homely Bengali (*śiva jñāne jīva sevā*) could be translated and amplified thus: 'Be certain in mind that living creatures are no less sacred than Lord Shiva and serve them as piously as you would the Lord.' This injunction, most important of all the saint laid down, was the corollary deduced from a Vedantic idea. Swami Vivekananda chose to put the idea to a London audience this way:

So work, says the Vedanta, putting God in everything, and knowing Him to be in everything. Work incessantly, holding life as something deified, as God Himself, and knowing that this is all we have to do, this is all we should ask for. God is in everything, where else shall we go to find Him?²

After Sri Ramakrishna left for the heavenly abode (16 August, 1886), his spirit passed into his immediate followers, and through them first in the country around, and then overseas through Swamis Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda, Trigunatita-

nanda and others. As during life, so Sri Ramakrishna was, in his spirit form, this band's spiritual director. And this director was altogether too independent and too progressive to remain within the trammels of any particular system.

The confraternity that ordained themselves one Christmas Eve following that August was rather small — eleven. These were the first who held the lamp of Ramakrishna's teachings close to their breast, sheltering its flickering flame against the wind of scepticism, casuistry, ridicule, or contempt. Firm, determined, indefatigable steps took the flame far and wide, set up micro-ashramas and then passed on, leaving the nurturing of these centres to the few that had seen the light in the new movement; this is the 'action' which Arnold Toynbee, the greatest of modern historians meant when he called the Ramakrishna movement 'unique in being expressed in action.' But for these apostles, Ramakrishna's message would have remained restricted to Calcutta and its suburbs. The message travelled to hills and forests, deserts and towns, villages and sea-coasts. These immediate followers nursed their kinetic faith, breaking up the mould of caste, religion and profession. In doing so they served rural India in the same way as the ubiquitous friars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who first brought ethics to the mass of Europe's population.

One of the oldest of such nurseries stands at Sargachhi, still a village, in the district of Murshidabad, 15 kilometres away

1. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), p. 13.

2. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 2, p. 150.

from the nearest railway station at the time of its birth (3 km now from Sargachhi station). Berhampore, the district headquarters, is a little more than 25 km to the northeast. Exactly a century ago, a monk belonging to the newly formed Ramakrishna Order came trekking northward along the course of the holy river Ganga. He was a monk who was not satisfied only in visiting shrines and practising japa. An avid traveller, he had been on foot over the majestic Himalayan range thrice and well inside Tibet, then (as now) a forbidden country. His zeal for roaming was boundless. He coincided with others of the brotherhood but he did not follow them to the monastery. Eremitic life was not this sannyasin's choice. Therefore, to slake his seemingly unquenchable thirst, he defied the bone-chilling cold of the Himalayas, starvation and extreme hardship. Only faith in his Master sustained him. As nothing was heard of, or from, him for more than four years, he was given up for dead.

The monk returned to tell his thrilling story. On the recovery of normal health after rest and treatment, he set out on foot again from Calcutta to acquaint himself with rural Bengal where the railway had not yet penetrated (then omnibuses were unknown in India). Moreover, Swami Vivekananda was again and again beseeching the brotherhood: 'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted — let these be your God.'³

It was a long walk that our monk took in 1896. Born of this long walk was a relief centre and later an orphanage, which now has become the Sargachhi Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama. The monk was Swami Akhandanandaji.

Where he arrived in the course of this arduous journey seemed a no man's land forsaken even by God. No temple; no mosque. A famine had been raging for months in that region. The bulk of the population then (as now) belonged to the Mohammedan faith;

their society consisted exclusively of agriculturists. Hungry children were everywhere around. They were not playing. Swami Akhandananda was stirred to his depths. He looked into their faces. He looked into their eyes; no sparkle, no gleam; dead. There was shortage of everything except squalor and misery. No socialist thought, no protest against the denial of human rights and dignity, was yet born. Life for these poor was a precarious drag from one hungry day to another. Vivekananda's words iterated in various forms before his mind, and their impact was tremendous. Like Jonah (*Old Testament*), Akhandananda heard the command of his Lord to become an instrument of mercy. The ever-itinerant monk decided to suspend his peregrinations.

Wandering up and down this territory, turned into a desert by drought, the monk took up his abode where he could: under a spreading tree, in the veranda of a hut, with the sun peeping through the big holes in the roof; he camped there. He spurned the food that traders offered him: the memory of women and children reduced to skeletons and drooping drove away his appetite as he sat down after a heavy day to a meagre diet of puffed rice and molasses.

The situation was so grim that the *sahib* from Berhampore had been obliged to camp in the area to oversee distribution of relief in the form of flattened rice and molasses or a handful of coarsest rice. The illiterate villagers were totally demoralized, the women in rags too shy to beg, though at death's door. It was a formidable challenge that Akhandananda decided to meet despite frailty. Still, it seems, was left some of his old stamina, persistence, and patience. How could he start with just a few paise in his pocket (and absolute faith in his Master)? All of them were warriors but Akhandananda was the bravest in that first Ramakrishna corps—a leader in battle.

Begging from one door to another, mostly of the few scattered Hindu traders

3. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 288.

who were sharp enough to master commerce (the ways of which are more complicated than agriculture), running from one official to another, calmly suffering insult or high-browism, the monk did his mite to 'serve God in Man', an ample justification of his book entitled *From Holy Wanderings to the Service of God in Man* (Madras; Ramakrishna Math). The Swami tarried here for a year. Mahula was the village in which this shepherd could build some sort of a centre for his flock. There lived in that village a holy man who believed and practised Tantrik rites to approach his God. He had migrated from somewhere in western India. He used to roam, a staff in hand, and hence was called *Dandi Thakur* (holy man with a staff). Swami Akhandananda inherited this appellation though actually he bore no *dandi*.

On a small plot of land scarcely measuring more than a few square metres at Mahula, he could raise a hut first and two more later on. In course of his relief work, he could not take under his care more than two orphans; these huts constituted the nucleus of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, to be hallowed soon by the dust of Vivekananda's feet. A few months later the centre was shifted to Sargachhi (an adjacent village) in a rented house (May 1897) with the money made available from the Headquarters, and donations and the participation of local people, and a band of dedicated volunteers. The Ashrama had its own building and premises in just sixteen years (March 1913). The first priority after food and shelter was given to education of the right sort, which included physical training, self-help, chanting of mantras, singing or listening to devotional songs,

working in the dairy, and the like. The new *Dandi Thakur* himself used to wield the pick and shovel until age and infirmity prevented him.

Even after a perceptive brotherhood elevated him to the high office of their President, this swami continued to stay at Sargachhi for most part of the year. The last addition to the Ashrama in his lifetime took place when the swami was a few months away from his end (1937, at the age of 71). It was a temple (*mandap*) where he wished to hold the annual Durga Puja. The Goddess took him to Her bosom before its completion. Thus he had served his God all his life.

Pens more informed and competent than mine relate the story of the Ashrama's progress elsewhere. I cannot stop without observing that later on many an institution on a similar pattern was founded in India (eg Gandhiji's Sabarmati, Sevagram and Sadvrat; Chandrasekhar's Bhuvanewari and Yercaud). They were all modified versions of the Ashrama which the Ramakrishna Mission first laboured into shape. Such has been one of their ways of approaching the Absolute. They have ever remained immersed in the flow of experience, combining idealism and practicality. In tracing so briefly the genesis of the Ashrama I have been encouraged by these words of Henri Bergson's: 'The interest of a living being lies in discovering in the present situation, what presented and followed the previous one, in order to profit by past experience.'⁴ □

4. *Matter and Memory*, translated by N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, 1911, pp. 322-4.

Sita is the name in India for everything that is good, pure and holy—everything that in woman we call womanly.... Through all this suffering she experiences, there is not one harsh word against Rama. She takes it as her own duty, and performs her own part in it.

—Swami Vivekananda

Reviews and Notices

BONES, STONES, AND BUDDHIST MONKS: By Gregory Schopen. Published by University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822. 1997. Pp. cvii+298. \$58 (cl), \$31.95 (pbk).

Once in a way we get a book which makes an original and far-ranging contribution to the subject chosen. Schopen's book is undoubtedly one such. It is based on the assumption that Buddhist studies have been textual, and overlook, if not marginalise, other sources, as he says, 'The ascription of primacy to textual sources in Buddhist studies not only effectively neutralises the independence of archaeological and epigraphical sources as witnesses, it also effectively excludes what practising Buddhists did and believed from the history of their own religion.'

This is certainly post-modernist—trying to ferret out data which is, thanks to several reasons, regarded as peripheral, although demonstrable evidence shows a different picture. Positing the binaries of textuality and actuality, Schopen says, 'Textuality overrides actuality. And actuality—as expressed by epigraphical and archaeological material—is denied independent validity as a witness. It may not be altogether surprising to note that' if we look at, for instance, the entire climate of donors, 'it shows how defective our textual sources can be as historical witnesses.'

Controverting the notion that textual Buddhism is to be relied upon, the author builds up several arguments ranging across several areas. For instance, the problem of the layman/monk distinction and the doctrine of the transference of merit based on donations. When a monk institutes a donation etched on epigraphic material in the name of his parents should we infer that for all the assumption of renunciation, attachment to the family is subtly endorsed to the extent of trying to buy merit for the parents? As Schopen says from this evidence, clearly 'it was held that someone could be expected to obtain nirvana as the result of an act of *pūja* undertaken on his behalf by another. It was held that acts of *pūja* could be undertaken for one's parents, whether living or dead. It was also held that acts of *pūja* could be undertaken for the sake of conferring health on others.'

This is a very curious situation — one among many uncovered by Schopen — and presents a picture contrary to the general images of monks assumed from normative texts. It is also surprising

that such things were acted upon by the monastic community and 'these were in fact monastic ideals and goals.' And some of these monks are not just those who embraced monasticism for the sake of a living but ardent practitioners of meditation—those who know the Buddhist canon thoroughly. The question is of not only transferring merit but even to plead for nirvana on behalf of the donor's family. There are, of course, inscriptions which are instituted for the sake of general well-being. But by and large, the inscriptions stem from motives which are largely familial. The irony is that all this evidence is generally ignored when it runs contrary to texts. In short, this material unearths the real motives while an idealized picture largely at variance with actuality is presented.

This material tells us 'the nature of the actual, as opposed to the ideal goals of religious activity.' The book consisting of 12 chapters is by and large an illustration of this basic evidence applied to areas such as the conception of a relic in the inscription, the cult of the local monastics, ritual obligations, and donor roles of monks. An amusing and highly suggestive study is on monks, nuns and vulgar practices which deals with the problem of the introduction of the image cult into Indian Buddhism. Even learned monks as evident from inscriptions are fond of setting up (*pratiṣṭhāpita*) of images. For instance, those at Sarnath and other places. The context raises the issue of the role and position of nuns also. The monk and the nun 'differ markedly from the ideal monk and nun who have been presented on the basis of textual material alone.' It is amusing but strangely reassuring to know that the average monk 'is preoccupied not with nirvana but above all else with what appears to have been a strongly felt obligation to his parents, whether living or dead. ... he appears in short very human and very vulnerable.' Inscriptional sources suggest 'a disproportionately strong sense of anxiety in regard to their "abandoned" parents on the part of individual monks and nuns.' From this the installation of images is only a logical step.

The book ought to be read by not only scholars but by all those who in the name of monasticism might have displaced filial longings and cultivated the cult of a personality instead of working out their own destiny, as Buddha said. In fact, one can even call this the opening up of several frames to study and assimilate the rise of modern religious movements, particularly the exuberant guru-cult. Schopen's scholarship is impeccable and cuts across many disciplines. Therefore it is not for those who have canonized spiritual figures and

institutions. Others who are open will find it a mine of information and insights applicable to contexts other than what the book has chosen to confine itself to.

Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna, Hyderabad

THE LIGHT OF RĀMĀYANA: By Justice P. Kodanda Ramayya. Published by Arsha Vijnana Trust, Plot No. 1361, Road No. 45, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad 500033. 1997. Pp. xiii+315. Rs. 100.

The *Rāmāyana* of Vālmīki is a lasting storehouse of wisdom in world culture. For the Indian, it is another form of the Vedas (*Vedaḥ prācīdasā āsit sākṣāt rāmāyanātmanā*). It gives us the fundamentals of the eastern wisdom. It is not only a story of Rāma but a narration of the good and evil aspects of human life. Vālmīki has portrayed an ideal manhood, a divine beauty of virtue and ethical order and a civilization founded on dharma. The story of the epic has been related in a language that is pure, chaste and simple.

The story of Śrī Rāma (*Rāmāyana*—the path trod by Rāma) was narrated first by sage Nārada to Vālmīki at the instance of the Creator-god Brahmā. That narration was composed by the poet and this was sung to the people of Ayodhya by the twin sons of Sītā. It tells us that in the contexts of devotion to parents, dedication to kingdom, sacredness of marital life, in all the three, Rāma surpassed everyone.

The epic is known as the *ādi-kāvya* (earliest poetic composition) as well as the *veda-kāvya*. It gives us the essence of dharma. Dharma here is not mere religious precept necessary for spiritual ends. It is also required for securing prosperity in one's own life (*niḥśreyasa and abhyudaya*).

The theme of the work under review is to draw the attention of the modern youth to the fact that several dharmas practised by Śrī Rāma are faculties that every human being should imbibe and

practise to make his or her life successful and purposeful.

Justice Kodanda Ramayya has designed from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyana* this enlightening work as a result of his analytical acumen, deep knowledge of the epic and devotion to Śrī Rāma. Rāma is the personification of dharma (*Rāmo vighrahavān dharmaḥ*). Dharma is said to be that which sustains the world. It exhorts man to perform his duty. It means *karmācarana*—performance of action. Truth is the life-blood of dharma. Self-control is its essence. But it is not very easy to practise the precepts of dharma unless we see or hear about the practice of the precepts by some great person. Rāma is incarnated to set an example of such practices in the human situation. He possessed manifold and rare virtues, nay, all virtues (*sarva guṇopetaḥ*). Some of them (67) have been enumerated in the epic by the *ādi-kavi*. The author compares them with those in the *Bhāgavata* (30 such virtues) as expounded by Vedavyāsa. The author finds that there are four basic dharmas found in these texts, namely, truth (*satya*), compassion (*dayā*), penance (*tapas*) and charity (*tyāga or dāna*). They have been highlighted in the major texts of Indian culture.

The book consists of two parts, each containing twelve topics. The first part deals with the concepts of truth (*satya*) and righteousness (*dharma*) and their facets with reference to the epic and to the present-day situation. The second part treats the story of the epic, its historicity, its inherent value and features which are specially eastern in character. An Appendix is given listing the dharmas enumerated by different authorities, and the virtues of Śrī Rāma for a comprehensive view of the subject. The picture of *Kodanda Rāma* painted by Raja Ravi Varma has been included after the Table of Contents. The publication contains a benediction from the present head of Kāñcī Kāmakoti Pīṭham.

The work throws light on the salient features of the epic in modern times. It is useful for young and old, laymen and scholars.

Prof. (Dr.) S.P. Dubey, Jabalpur

Rāmanavami is celebrated this month...

Rama and Sita are the ideals of the Indian nation.... The height of a woman's ambition is to be like Sita, the pure, the devoted, the all-suffering! ... For the race, Sita stands as the ideal of suffering. India says, 'Show your power by suffering.'

—Swami Vivekananda

News and Reports

Flood Relief Operations by the Ramakrishna Mission

West Bengal

The Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters distributed, through its branch in Malda, thousands of items of clothing including dhotis, saris and children's garments among the flood-affected people of Malda district. The work covered more than 30 villages of the district.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, conducted a massive flood relief operation in Murshidabad district by distributing 2,48,000 kg rice, 21,150 kg pulses, etc among 6000 flood-affected families belonging to 36 villages. Steps were also taken to distribute large quantities of clothing, blankets and other necessities among the most needy.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jalpaiguri, distributed hundreds of items of clothing and 3210 blankets among the flood-stricken families of Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts.

Large quantities of assorted clothes were despatched to Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Contai, for immediate distribution in Murshidabad and Midnapore districts.

Orissa

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri, distributed 200 saris, 200 dhotis, 200 chadars, and 117 assorted garments among 139 families of Puri Sadar.

Bangladesh

Arrangements were made to despatch large quantities of saris, lungis, blankets, and corrugated galvanized iron sheets to Dhaka for distribution in several areas of Bangladesh.

Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur, distributed a considerable quantity of foodstuffs and clothing in a relief work which helped more than 1000 families of 26 villages around Dinajpur. Besides, 523 flood-stricken patients were treated.

Ramakrishna Mission Rehabilitation Work

Gujarat Cyclone Rehabilitation

In collaboration with Ramakrishna Ashrama, the cyclone rehabilitation work continued at two villages in Jamnagar district. While preparations were being made to inaugurate the newly built village at Chaslana, 14 houses were erected up to plinth level and foundation has been laid for 18 more houses in Nandana village.

Andhra Pradesh Cyclone Rehabilitation

After construction of piers and abutments, arrangements were made to launch pre-stressed concrete girders for the proposed Vivekananda Bridge across Vruddha Gautami estuary at Pallavaripalem village in East Godavari district.

Maharashtra Earthquake Rehabilitation

In collaboration with Loka Siksha Parishad, Narendrapur, and Excel Industries, Mumbai, the integrated rural development work continued in Latur district. A Mahila Udyog Kendra is now training village women in tailoring. Other activities were: (a) installation of 21 smokeless ovens and 40 low-cost latrines, (b) cultivation of 144 nutritional gardens, (c) training villagers in improved agricultural techniques, (d) providing agricultural finance to 314 farmers, (e) continuance of educational programme with free coaching for 29 students, and (f) providing first-aid health care to 327 patients.

People have only a superficial idea of the meaning of selfless action, not a clear grasp. For, if they are once convinced, how can they ever resist practising it? Only the self-deluded talk glibly of having understood it. Complete surrender to truth is an indispensable condition of selfless action.

—Swami Turiyananda